THE BY-WAYS OF BRAITHE

FRANCES POWELL

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THE BY-WAYS OF BRAITHE

BY

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Seed, Leafe, Stalke, Floure,
Have evil Savour.
Plight troutbe Faith and Honour,
Ysaved wele Braithe Manor.
New Leafe, Stalke, Floure.
Have Soot Fair Savour.

I

It was high noon, and the little valley was flooded with sunshine. This was good for delicate little Jane, who sat in her cart perched high on the bank above the brook, watching my struggles with a big hot-bed frame that I was trying to place over the water-cresses. There had been frost during the night, but it had spared the cresses, and I wished to coax them to live a little longer for Janey's sake. She liked them with her bread and butter.

The tiny valley, with its brook, was situated midway between Braithe House, which stood on the high edge of the plateau near the river, and what had once been the entrance gates, a mile to the west. Formerly Braithe Manor had boasted an avenue two miles in length; but that was before the new road by the river, from Hilltown, had been opened. This highway turned into what had been our avenue, up the hill westward from the valley, and joined the old inland stage road at the point where our entrance

had once stood. Now, lodge, gates, and gate-keeper, had vanished forever.

It was across a ruinous stone arch, spanning the brook, and on between two stone pillars, fast crumbling away, that we now entered the mile of avenue leading to Braithe. So were the past glories of the Manor shorn!

In the hot-bed frame there remained but few panes of glass, and these were cracked. Still they might protect the cresses, could I get them in place; but the frame was very heavy.

"Here come Mr. and Mrs. Gill!" cried Janey, from her cart.

The Chevalier, our gold and tan collie, stopped digging for moles, to look up and listen.

"O Charles Stuart!" said Jane, reproachfully, "your nose is thick with mud. And Mrs. Gill admires you so much!"

The Chevalier's fine manners were not a whit altered by this fact; and he dashed forward, to meet the buggy coming down the Farm Road, as gayly courteous as if his coat were spotless. Janey's cart was on the edge of this road, which led northward through the woods to Braithe Farm, and the buggy drew up beside her.

"Little Miss Janey!" cried Mrs. Gill kindly, leaning out, "And how does she do?" Then, catching sight of me, "Well, Miss Theo, what are you tryin' to do with that tremenjious frame?"

I explained.

"I want to know!" she ejaculated, staring at me through gold-rimmed spectacles. "I'm afraid it's quite a little heavy."

"It is heavy," I assented, and looked at Mr. Gill—and smiled.

He bounced out of the buggy, and running down the bank grasped the opposite end of the frame with

fat white fingers. He was Mrs. Gill's latest husband, her third; a puffy-faced, richly attired young man. Observing his green satin neck-tie, with its pattern of red horseshoes, and gold tandem-whip scarf-pin, I concluded that he and Mrs. Gill were on their way to visit friends; so I was the more sorry when, in his eagerness to help me, his foot slipped, and he slid into the water. Casting a frightened glance toward the buggy, he scrambled out, but one trouser leg was soaking wet, and his immaculate shirt cuffs soggy. Little Jane, leaving her cart as the accident happened—Janey was very quick-witted—clambered into the buggy, and held Mrs. Gill in earnest conversation.

"I am so very, very sorry, Mr. Gill," I murmured remorsefully. "Let me dry your cuffs with my handkerchief," and I drew it out, forgetting, until I saw it, that it was what Janey called a make-believe, and not the real article. A square of green-sprigged muslin, carelessly hemmed, once a gown of Lydia's, then a frock for Janey, at last eight handkerchiefs. In some places the green sprigs had become holes. Mr. Gill gallantly pretended not to be surprised by this curious bit of economy on the part of Miss Braithe of Braithe Manor, but he seemed agitated when I tried to dry his cuffs. "It is a shame, when you looked so nice, and were so kind in helping me! See, the frame is just where it should be; I could never have managed it alone. Janey will be delighted."

"Don't mention it, Miss Braithe, don't mention it!" he said hurriedly, and followed me up the bank, blushing deeply.

Mr. Gill was an astute young man, and knew how to keep on the right side of his elderly wife. This he proved by walking a little behind me on our way to the buggy, and by taking advantage of my speak-

ing with Mrs. Gill, to mount quickly beside her, and conceal his damp trouser leg in the folds of her gown. They drove off in high good-humor, something that Mr. Gill said in a low tone seeming to please Mrs. Gill mightily.

"Her spectacles chock-full of dust!" said Janey, climbing slowly into her cart.

"Dust, Janey?"

"Yes, Theo, yes; the dust of his flattery. And he fairly busting with pride because of you! Well, you got the frame fixed, anyway." And she laughed in her elfish fashion.

"Did you remember to thank her for the cream, Goldilocks?"

"Yes," she said irritably, "and I hope she won't send any more. I know, I know, Theo; you needn't trouble to say 'she means to be kind'! I know that as well as you, but she does ask such tiresome questions; and I had to keep her talking, because of your ways. It's always, 'How old are you, dearie?' 'Ten, Mrs. Gill.' 'And you look eight, and talk fourteen!' Then she sighs, and admires my hair" —the child glanced at the splendid masses that shrouded her to the waist—"but she says to herself, 'Poor hunchbacked little creature! I must send her something.'—There! Charles Stuart's digging again! Chevalier, Chevalier! Come, sir, come!"

It was mid-October. The locust trees, lined up on either side the avenue, like a guard of honor, wore uniforms of gold. Many of the dark cedars, climbing the opposite hill-side, had mantles of scarlet woodbine. The Chevalier, racing across the bridge to join us, looked like a yellow leaf, whirled along by the wind.

"He should drag me up this hill, not you, Theo!" said Janey. "I'm sorry I was cross just now. I

remembered it was your birthday, too. I was afraid Mrs. Gill might ask your age, but she didn't. I meant to lie if she did. I should hate to hear her say, 'Twenty-three—and not married yet! I want to know!' How could you possibly care to marry, with father in the house—but Mrs. Gill's a fool. Father's certainly a scourge—a scourge of scorpions. Why do they make the devil a dark man, Theo? Oh, I know! It's because he contrasts better with the red-and-yellow hell behind him. For the ice-and-snow hell I should think a fair D. would go better. Father would make a splendid one. He has such a nasty expression in his blue eyes—the real Braithe look! I haven't it in mine, have I, Theo?" in a sudden agony of fear. "Say I haven't, say it quick!"

"Goose! Your blue eyes are lovely, and you know it, little vain thing! Want any more compliments, missy? Now's your time, because it's my birthday. Shall I crown the Cats with red leaves in its honor?"

We had reached the gate in the iron fence that inclosed the lawns and gardens, shutting them off from the meadow-land edging the avenue thus far. On the stone pillars of the gate sat stone leopards, holding each, close clasped to his breast, a shield bearing the Braithe motto:

GARE GRIFFES.

Snarling, fangs bared, quite ready, although one had lost a forepaw, and long neglect, with years of exposure to wind and weather, had made them a mouldy pair enough!

"They are the image of father," said little Jane. "No, don't crown them, Theo. Why, look! There comes a buggy down the avenue"—we kept no horses. "O Theo, it's father! I shall flee!"

This she did, hopping out of the cart and diving under the fence, homeward. I waited, standing near the Leopards.

The buggy drew up between the pillars, and my father got out.

"Drive on a bit, please, Abel," he said to Mrs. Gill's eldest son, Abel Wylde, who was driving him. "I wish to say good-by to Miss Braithe."

I answered Abel's greeting; and took time to inquire after his ever feeble health, to the great, though suppressed annoyance of Mr. Braithe. Himself ever courteous to outsiders, he resented his children's efforts toward good manners, never imagining that they might feel the kindliness they expressed.

"Why waste time on that idiot, Theodora?" he asked, when Abel had at last driven on. "Not that I mean to find fault, love," smiling unpleasantly, "but I am going to town. I only stopped to offer my congratulations to my beautiful daughter upon her birthday," and he kissed my cheek.

I knew he had something disagreeable to say. Something particularly disagreeable, that is—he never said anything pleasant. He would wish, I also knew, to make me lose my temper and answer back. I determined not to gratify him.

"I have the opal in my pocket," he went on, speaking slowly, his musical, low-toned voice exquisitely modulated, as always—as always, never mind how outrageous or wicked his words might be: a Braithe inheritance. "The Gypsy's Opal, Theo, that your dear mother brought into the family, along with a very pretty dowry." He sighed heavily. "Yes, I can't but own that my two other matches have been mistakes—cruel mistakes. Brought about by proximity—a lonely country-house—a sensitive nature!"

Thus he kept me on the rack as long as possible.

The twin Leopards on their high perches grinned in sympathy. Tall, graceful, fair, he stood in front of his ancestral shield; an aristocrat from the crown of his well-poised head to the soles of his high-arched feet.

"I was sorry when you proved to be a girl, Theodora, but I bore your mother no grudge; she had treated me fairly otherwise. When your first governess, Lilian's mother, brought another girl to Braithe, I own I thought her ungrateful; but it was left to Lydia to insult our House by disgracing it with a hunch-backed brat."

He ceased speaking, wishing me to cry out fiercely —as once before—whose fault it was that my darling's spine grew wrong; to denounce him yet again for the viciously careless push that had hurled a mere baby down the flight of steep stone steps to the hard flagging below. I stood quite still, silent, denying him satisfaction. He was disappointed, but other arrows remained in his quiver.

"Well, well, I will not sadden the birthday of the Beauty of Braithe by harping on forgiven injuries." He took from his breast pocket a jewel-case of mother-of-pearl, large, in shape oval, and held it in his hand. "I hoped to clasp this about your throat on your wedding-day, Theodora, but I am convinced that that day will never arrive. You have inherited from my side of the house a fatal fondness for idle —may I use the vulgar word—flirtation? The only expressive one really, for you are no coquette, my daughter. You share with me the desire to please. A praiseworthy desire in itself, only, most unfortunately, it sometimes—twice in my case—carries one too far. A woman, however, may draw back at the last moment; as you have always done. I don't blame you, Theo. How pale you are, my love! And your expression, quite odd. So must your

Scotch ancestress have looked when she dragged the gypsy girl into her coach and, leaning from its window, beat the ringleader of the pursuing mob across the face with her fan. You are very pale; are you ill?"

I shook my head, without speaking. I dared not unleash my unruly tongue.

"This opal might bring you good luck. But no, it could not; it hung at your mother's throat the day she had heart-failure, and died. I was on my way to her to break the news of our loss of fortune—but she was gone, poor girl! Do opals lose their lustre from being shut away, Theo? It looks dull to me," and he opened the case.

There it lay, my mother's opal—for it was no Braithe jewel—my opal; yes, mine, by every law of man. A great oval gem, clasped close by its curious setting, a snake of dull gold, with its tail in its mouth—the symbol of eternity. The jewel did look dull—all pale lavenders and grays. Mr. Braithe eyed it peevishly and, forgetting his amiable rôle, broke out into sweet-voiced complaints.

"Just my damned bad luck if the cursed stone should go back on me at the last moment! I wish to the Lord I'd sold it years ago! Rappelle would have bought it at the first chance. All Lydia's doing—sickly-faced, mewling cat! Curse her superstitious fancies! It's enough to drive a man mad to live in the same house with the two of you: you, with your everlasting canting religion, and she—" He handed me the case. "Look at it, can't you? Is there anything amiss with the damned thing?"

The blood rushed into my cheeks as I obeyed. What if he should not sell it, after all? It was not his, but mine; he had no right to take it from me. I looked lovingly at the gem, which suddenly blazed with color. Vivid greens and crimsons flashed across

its smooth surface. My father seized it, staring angrily.

"Are you in league with the devil?" he cried, musically; and shutting the case with a snap, thrust it into his pocket and strode away.

The buggy rolled down the avenue; the October sunshine filled the air with pleasant warmth, but I —I felt cold.

II

When Vivian de Vere Braithe quarrelled with his brother, Theodore, the Head of the House, he left England to seek a home in America. He not only failed to warn Theodore of this important step, but went away as quietly as possible, taking with him his brother's promised bride, and as many valuables as he could lay his hands on. With this loot Vivian purchased a large tract of land on the Hudson River, and built himself as exact a copy as was possible of the old Manor House in England—secret chambers, hidden passages, heraldic devices, and all.

By the time Theodore de Vere Braithe had discovered Vivian's whereabouts the war with England began; and Vivian, lustily espousing the cause of his adopted country, escaped punishment.

Like all the Braithes, he possessed great physical courage, delighting, probably, in the exhilaration that danger brings. And he won not only high praise by his bravery, but a most devoted henchman as well, in one Etienne Rappelle, Frenchman, and private soldier. My great-great-great-grandfather had carried this young man, badly wounded, from the field of battle, at the risk of his own life. Had he chanced upon the stranger lying, in equal need of assistance, in some lonely wood-path, would old Vivian have rescued him? I fear not; the good Samaritan being no kin of the Braithes.

Etienne Rappelle served his rescuer faithfully all his life; and trained his only son, the second Etienne,

to follow in his footsteps. The third Etienne, however, declined to remain in the Braithe service, although, like his father, he took a solemn oath always to stand by the family. Going to one of our Western towns, he began his career as errand-boy in a grocery shop; and as he was shrewd, industrious, and severely economical, he prospered with the town, becoming its chief banker. When he died the town had grown a large city, and his death was felt to be a public loss.

My father looked down upon Etienne IV, the grocer's son, as he scornfully called him. Mr. Rappelle inherited his father's talent for finance, and, it was said, had already doubled the large fortune left him. I sometimes wondered if he, too, had been obliged to take the ridiculous old oath of allegiance to the Braithes. I feared that he had; and that my father, the present Vivian de Vere Braithe, did not scruple to avail himself of the Rappelle money. How else could he afford to dress so well, to spend so much time in town, putting up at one of the most expensive clubs? I had never met Mr. Rappelle; I hoped I might never meet him; I felt I should be ashamed to look him in the face, with Mr. Braithe's purse full of Rappelle dollars.

My stepmother, Lydia, had a small, a very small, annuity. On this we lived; and besides her pittance, my father declared we had not a cent in the world. Because of our poverty Mr. Braithe took us to Europe when I was fourteen; and there we remained, drifting from one cheap pension to another, until my twenty-first birthday, when, for the sake of a problematical legacy, he brought us home. The legacy was to have been left Lilian by a rich great-uncle, but she was not even mentioned in his will; and the expense of the home-coming, and of Lilian's journey, a long one, to visit this rich relative, left us very much out of pocket.

We lived quite alone at Braithe Manor. There were agreeable, well-bred people in Hilltown, seven miles south of Braithe, and others owning country-seats in its vicinity. My mother had known many of these families, and so soon as we were at home again they hastened, in friendly fashion, to welcome us back.

"We don't live in a style to permit our enjoying social intercourse with our equals," Mr. Braithe announced in his sweet-toned voice, "and I'm damned if I'll stand being condescended to by them. Your pretence of ill health may be turned into some service now, Lydia. Say you're not able to return their cursed patronizing calls; do you hear me? Send cards, Madam Hypochondriac, cards. The girls? No, they shan't go, either. Theo's too fast, and Lilian's too slatternly. I'm ashamed of the lot of you. Stay at home."

This we did, and when Lydia and Janey were not suffering, or Lilian too discontented, I was sufficiently happy. Unable to pay good wages, we rarely had a servant, and I was busy from morning till night; I think this work did me no harm, since it left me little time for grumbling; but when I crossed the lawn on my way to the house that fine October morning, my heart was filled to the brim with bitterness. Seeing Lydia coming to meet me, I tried to keep this feeling from showing in my face. Poor little fragile Lydia! Once pretty—a pink-cheeked, small-featured blonde—she had faded and become prematurely old. As she drew near I saw that her worn face was even more drawn and pinched than usual. I put out my hand to her.

"Don't take it so hard, Lydia!" I said with assumed cheerfulness. "The opal was always in his desk, you know—I never really owned it. I shall mind your worrying yourself ill much more than its loss."

"How dared he!" she said, faintly. "Oh, how dared he!"

The house, built of bits of stone welded together with plaster—in old Revolutionary fashion—now loomed above us. Little Jane appeared on its threshold, swinging wide the heavy oaken door, and looking down upon us from the top of the long flight of stone steps.

"Has he really, really gone?" she cried. Then, nodding at her mother, "*Le roi est mort, mort, mort!*" she sang. "*Vive la reine!*" And she began to dance lightly back and forth—a fairy child, with her sparkling eyes and mane of golden hair, against the yawning portal, black as the mouth of a cavern.

"Hush, Jane, hush!" said Lydia, sharply.

Turning to look at her, I was horrified by her pallor.

"Janey won't fall, Lydia," I said, thinking the child's position the cause of her change of color. "Lean on me, pray," and I put my arm around her.

Little Jane paused in her dance, bewildered. "Do I frighten you, mummy?" she queried.

"What's up?" asked a sweet, melodious voice from the hall, and Lilian lounged into view. Lilian's voice was intensely ladylike; her words not always so. She was tall and graceful, her pretty fair hair as soft and fleecy as corn-silk, and her eyes the Braithe blue. She had no color unless pleasantly excited; then a wild-rose flush appeared. This seldom happened at Braithe, pleasant excitements being of rare occurrence. Sometimes this color came when I wondered to see it, Lilian and I not always agreeing as to what was pleasant.

"What's up?" she repeated. "Oh, I see. Lydia faint with joy over the departure of darling pa! Goodness, what a relief it is to get rid of him! I think you might choose the time he's home, Lydia, to

be sick; it's disgustingly mean of you to make us uncomfortable now."

She sank down on the upper step, and, leaning her pretty head against the house wall, looked with contemptuous dislike at her stepmother.

"Lilian," said Lydia, solemnly, and as if sure of instant comprehension and sympathy, "Lilian, he has taken, and means to sell—the Gypsy's Opal!"

"Good God!" cried Lilian, springing to her feet, the wild-rose pink flushing her pale cheeks; he's mad."

Stooping, she pulled up her slipper—one or the other was always trodden down at the heel—and scuffed down the steps to Lydia.

When superstitious fancies took possession of my sister and stepmother they buried the hatchet and were in complete sympathy. I went on into the house, wishing I might take Janey with me, for she was eagerly listening to her elders' unwise discussion; but her mother approved of her hearing everything, so I was powerless.

The entrance hall, though well-sized, served as a mere vestibule to the larger one, which, occupying the middle of the house, rose to the roof. A gallery gave access to the bedrooms; and it was lighted by a small, insufficient skylight far above. This main hall ran across the house, from the north to the south wing, and in its great fireplace an ox might have been roasted whole. Directly opposite the entrance door, the fireplace must, in the lifetime of old Vivian, have given a cheerful welcome to each incoming guest, with its blazing logs as promise of plenty. Without a fire in its black depths it was but a terror the more to the bedward going child, possessed of a vivid imagination—and one flaring candle. I had rarely seen a fire upon that hearth. The hall was always dark and gloomy; so dark, indeed, that one could scarcely

decipher the verse carved on the oak panel above the chimney-piece:

Seed, Leafe, Stalke, Floure
Have evil Savour.
Plight trouthe Faith and Honour,
Ysaved wele Braithe Manor.
New Leafe, Stalke, Floure,
Have soot Fair Savour.

As a child I had thought "soot" meant chimney-black, and that the last line of the verse said the same, ironically, as the second. Lydia taught me that soot meant sweet in old English, and wished me to share her belief that a meaning, a prophecy of great wisdom, lurked in the quaint doggerel. Poor Lydia! The mass of picturesque nonsense connected with Braithe was very dear to her. She and Lilian believed, and cherished, every superstition belonging to the House. I sometimes fancied they regretted that the family ghost had, perforce, been left behind in England, where there was no longer a Braithe Manor, the old home having burned down, and its lands having passed into other hands. The English Braithes had died out—and this was well. A bad race, alas! Often and often have I wished that no Braithe blood tainted my veins.

Opening the tall mahogany door to the right of the chimney-place, I entered the drawing-room, through whose six French windows you looked across a pillared portico, over the river, to the Highlands that barred the southeastern horizon—an exquisite view. The long drawing-room had a chimney-place at either end. Over one hung a portrait of my father; over the other my mother, in a gown of pink satin, a pink rose in her brown hair, and around her slender throat a diamond chain, supporting the Gypsy's Opal. From its place beneath this portrait I took down a miniature, in a

gold frame. It represented a very beautiful woman who, like my mother, wore the opal on its diamond chain about her neck. Her hair, soft and dark, as black as velvet, rippled back from a broad, low brow; her long gray eyes shone out beneath level, delicately pencilled black eyebrows.

"Dear me, Theo, how lovely she is!" said Jane, suddenly, in her clear treble. She had slipped into the room after me, and having climbed a chair, peeped at the miniature over my shoulder. "See her little straight nose, Theo, and her pretty mouth, with its smiling corners! Let me kiss the dimple in her chin, because it's her birthday, you know," and tilting my head back she kissed, not the miniature, but me. "Mother says you are one and the same, Theo," the child went on, "the Countess born again. How splendid you must have looked when you opened the door of your coach and gave the poor gypsy sanctuary!" —Janey was not particular as to the words she used, provided they were strong—"when you stood fronting the mob, who wanted to drag her from behind you, and struck the ringleader across the face with your fan! Blazing in satin and jewels, the tall houses of smoky Edinburgh shutting in the narrow, dirty street, but not shutting down your courage, Theo, as you called to your postillions to 'Ride the dogs down!' "

The child's voice rang out shrill in her excitement, echoing through the lofty room. Then, eying me with intense curiosity, she asked, "How did you feel just after, Theo? Can you remember? All shaky and queer? Was your fan broken, and did it have jewelled sticks? The opal was on the gypsy's bosom then, and protected her, mother says. After, when, in her gratitude, she gave it to you—then the Countess—was her luck lost, do you think? See, the jewel gleams in the picture! As bright, in its odd way, as

the diamonds of its chain. Your mother had the chain, too. But you have nothing, nothing, my poor Theo—save the Countess's beautiful face. That father cannot take away!" She began to cry, overexcited by what she had heard. "They say the opal will avenge you," she sobbed, resisting my efforts to soothe her; "that if you could hold it, even for one minute, your luck would change; that father's bad luck comes from his shutting it away from you, and that now——"

"Hush, Janey, hush!" I cried. "Don't believe these fairy tales."

"Fairy tales!" echoed the child, contemptuously; "bogie stories I call 'em. Oh, here they come." And Lydia entered with Lilian, the latter, as usual, stopping in the doorway to right her slipper.

Lilian was untidy; she always declared she would be neat if she were rich. Because of the little excitement, a pleasant one to her, her cheeks were pink and she looked very pretty if a trifle unkempt, with hair coming down.

"O Theo," she exclaimed, seeing the miniature in my hand, "what are you going to do?"

"Hide this," I said, bitterly, "lest it prove too tempting for Braithe honor."

She exchanged a glance with Lydia; one of hungry curiosity. I rose to leave the room. Angry with Mr. Braithe, I feared I might become irritable and disagreeable did I remain longer with those who, though innocent, were aggravating.

"Where are you going?" asked Lilian.

"To the Cell of Flagellation," I said, knowing she would not care to follow me there; and hurried away.

III

The windows of my room looked to the west, across the broad lawn, between the Leopards of the gate, far down the avenue of locusts. Braithe House stood on the edge of a noble plateau, whose steep, well-wooded banks rose grandly from the river both on the east and south, and from the little valley on the west. Northward, the land sloped upward to Braithe Farm.

I could not see the river from these windows; but I had a charming view of the sunset, through the tall rows of locust-trees. Next to my room—that to the uninitiated appeared to occupy the entire space above the entrance hall—was the secret chamber, called by Jane the Cell of Flagellation, because I often retired there to do penance for my many shortcomings and to pray for guidance. It was, in reality, a narrow cell of stone, dimly lighted by a mere slit in the outside wall. In the English house a Vivian Braithe—they were all Vivians, Herberts, and Theodores—had shut up his eldest son, Theodore, in the secret chamber, and there starved him to death. Theodore walked, as the country people say; and, so runs the story, the wicked father not only had no fear of his son's ghost, but used politely to salute it whenever it crossed his path.

Because this poor starved Theodore had remained in his own country, "in his own haunts," Mr. Braithe punningly said, I was allowed to use the new secret chamber openly. The hidden passages in the enormously thick walls, and their communication with the outer world, remained a secret between Mr. Braithe

and me—as eldest child—according to long-established custom.

Upon my return from Europe I had been taken by my father through all the By-Ways of Braithe; a chart of the House had been placed in my possession, and I had taken the old oath not to reveal, save under certain conditions, my secret, to any but my heir. These musty, time-worn tradtions were exceedingly distasteful to me; seeming foolish, and out of place in an American family. The past glory of Braithe sprang from rapine and crime. A rank poisonous flower, it deserved to wither; to die down out of sight.

The secret cell was entered by a narrow door, cunningly concealed behind a part of the wainscot, that slid to one side on pressing a hidden spring. But as yet my mind was in too angry a state of turmoil to turn toward prayer. I dared not seek help and guidance until I had made myself more worthy of receiving them, by first governing and beating down the Braithe spirit that held possession. For my father had been right in what he had said of my fatal fondness for flirtation—since that is the word commonly used to describe an overmastering desire to please—and it was the knowledge of this baleful inheritance that was now, in turn, rousing that other, my Braithe temper. This last, however, I sometimes hoped might not have come from the Braithes, since with it ran no tendency to sneer.

I sat down by my open window, and leaning my elbows on the wide stone sill stared absently across the broad sweep of lawn, out between the Leopards and the long rows of locust-trees, to the cedar-crowned hill that ended the vista. That stern judge, Conscience, called me before its bar, and bade me review my conduct. Even an hour ago I had yielded to my liking for what Lydia, who had for me a blind affection, called diver-

sion. I had enjoyed the swiftness with which Mr. Gill had responded to my unspoken appeal for help with the hot-bed frame; although—this the Braithe demon, my hated familiar wickedly whispered—I had not tried to gain his aid. No, I had merely left my eyes to their own devices. Must you close them then? asked the demon.

How might I ever learn to conquer this failing, I wondered. Since Lydia's first coming to Braithe, when she had at once taught me that in order to judge others fairly we must first judge ourselves; that in order to be innocuous toward our fellows, we must pull up all weeds liable to do damage; ever since then I had been struggling with this poisonous Braithe ivy. But it clung tenaciously, in spite of my every effort to tear it away.

As I stared, unseeing, from my window, I remembered some who had suffered from my Braithe ways. The kindly English clergyman, who had grown to care far too much for me. Here the Braithe demon again remonstrated: Why blame yourself? You thought he was fond of you as a daughter, merely—until too late.

I tried not to listen to this specious pleading, but hastened to bring another skeleton from out of my overfull cupboard. I thought of the handsome officer, the young German, who had come to the English pension where we were wintering—in a certain German *Bad*—to study English. He had shot himself. God help me, I had never dared ask why.

I sprang to my feet and moved restlessly about the room, pausing, at last, before two photographs hung one above the other: a handsome man, and a boy, more handsome still. Mr. Braithe—my father—and my first cousin, Herbert Braithe Fayne. The two resembled each other closely; and I had always thought it was because of this resemblance, and not because

Herbert was an orphan, that he had almost lived at the Manor before we went abroad.

"Herbert ought to be my heir, not you, Theodora," Mr. Braithe had often said. "He is a true Braithe in looks as in nature; while you——" But he had no words in which to express his scorn further.

I wondered, as I scrutinized closely the beautiful face of the boy, if he had grown into as handsome a man as he then promised. For he had been very beautiful. When I felt kindly toward him, I had been wont to call him Apollo Belvedere; when irritated by his Braithe tendencies, Alcibiades the Perverted.

Even in the photograph his blonde beauty shone forth resplendent. The small head, with its thick, fair curls, thrown back so carelessly, as though the better to meet the friendly admiration that must surely fall to his share; the delicate aquiline nose, the large eyes—blue as sapphires and, sometimes, as hard—the Grecian mouth with its sensuous curves, the easy poise of the graceful figure, all were there. And, as I looked, I remembered the strange nature that these handsome features concealed. The apparent impossibility, on the part of this beautiful youth, to distinguish between right and wrong; the insinuating grace of manner with which he strove to blind the eyes of others to his too frequent lapses from well-doing. In the days when he had lived at the Manor I had not learned, through Lydia's teaching, to make allowances for others; and fierce and frequent had been the battles between Bertie Fayne and me. To me right and wrong stood forth as clearly as black and white; but sometimes it seemed as though Bertie could not distinguish between the two.

For some reason Mr. Braithe had not asked his nephew to revisit the Manor since our return; and although Lilian had met him, when on her visit to her great-uncle, I could learn nothing from her. Had

he changed, both in character and appearance, or was he still the same? James Wylde, Mrs. Gill's second son, a dark-browed, sullen young gypsy, who had played with Bertie and me when we were all three but children, had altered sadly. It was he who had met us on our arrival at Hilltown, after our long absence. He had grown into a tall, strong man, but the odd gypsy look remained. I had sat beside him on the seven-mile drive homeward to the Manor, and his air of sullen reticence had vanished under the real friendliness of my feeling for him.

"You're just the same, Miss Braithe, as you always was," he had said finally. "I guess you're the sort as don't change."

"I shall never be 'Miss Braithe' to you, Jim," I had answered, smiling, "never mind if Bertie were to appear this moment and fight you again."

To my surprise he had colored deeply and pretended to become absorbed in his horses, while my mind reverted to the fight I had recalled to his memory. It had occurred on the morning of my thirteenth birthday, in the carriage-house of the dusty Braithe stables, already used only to store the overflow from the Wyldes' barns—stables built, like the house, after those of the English Braithe; with courtyard, clock-tower, and bell to warn retainers of danger a-foot. The clock in the tower, however, was always kept in repair and going; this being one of the unwritten laws of the House.

Lilian, then eight years old, had come running to tell me of the quarrel between the boys, her corn-silk hair floating over her shoulders, her cheeks wearing the color of the wild rose.

"Theo," she had cried, her sweet voice vibrant, her blue eyes sparkling, "Bertie and Jim are having a bloody fight in the coach-house! Come quick, and see 'em kill each other."

On our way there, she had pantingly explained the cause of the quarrel. Herbert, in a sneering humor, had told Jim that he ought to call me Miss Braithe, instead of Theo, pointing out the difference between us in birth, and reminding him that I had entered my teens and must henceforth be treated, by my inferiors, as Miss Braithe, of Braithe.

Jim had promptly resented what he considered intermeddling. Usually Herbert's willing slave—dominated by the other's personal charm, superior intelligence, and skill in all field sports—he rebelled only when I was in question; invariably siding with me against Bertie, and protecting me from him when my cousin was in one of his teasing moods.

I remembered the strange scene that had followed my arrival at the stables, where, in the centre of the coach-house, the two combatants were struggling together; coats off, sleeves rolled up, and each belted tightly with a moth-eaten saddle girth. Herbert was fifteen, Jim a year younger, but they were well matched; since what Jim lacked in science he made up for in single-heartedness of purpose. Herbert, only half in earnest, wished to inflict punishment, but avoid injury; Jim, his fierce temper thoroughly aroused, cared nothing for the blows he might receive, so long as those he gave went home.

Although one of Herbert's beautiful eyes was already half closed, he had seen me enter, and, prompted by a desire to torment, had called out to me to go home, and leave the punishing of my servant to him. This indulgence cost him dear. Jim, mad with fury, redoubled his efforts; while Herbert, curious to see how I felt toward them, forgot to be on his guard; Jim's fist caught his chin and down he went, while the victor sat down hard on his chest.

I was wild with excitement.

"Sit still, Jim," I cried. "He shall apologize. He

has fallen because he is a tyrant; you have conquered because you were fighting for liberty. He is Gesler; you are William Tell."

"William couldn't have done it, Dolly," Herbert had said, his good-nature suddenly restored, "if Gesler hadn't shown him how." He smiled up at Jim in his sunny, charming way, his disarming way. "Say, old chap, you're beastly heavy, do you know it? Just get up, will you? That last whack was scientific. I'm proud of you, Jim."

Jim's scowl vanished; he looked sheepish, almost ashamed.

"Don't move, Jim," I commanded, stamping my foot. "He owes you an apology; he shall make one."

"Mercy, what a termagant!" said Herbert, teasingly. "I'm sorry I fought for you; you're not worth it, Dolly"—his name for me, a contraction of Dora.

Jim's scowl returned.

"You take that back," he said, threateningly. "You sha'n't sass her while I'm 'round. Now then, Bert Fayne, say you're sorry."

"I'm sorry!" bleated Herbert, with assumed meekness. "Tell your champion to let me get up, Helen of Troy." He smiled at me as if the whole affair amused him; as if we were children; he a man, diverted by our folly. But I, who knew him well, divined that he would, later, in some underhand way, pay Jim out. As for Lilian, she wept bitterly, that the two she detested had not killed one another.

Poor Jim! Shortly after our return from Europe he had fought fiercely with his young step-father, Mr. Gill, and had left home, vowing never to return. Rumors of his having become a black sheep reached me from time to time. I was unhappy when I thought of my kind playmate.

As I turned away from the photograph of Herbert, I thought again of the wrong Mr. Braithe had done

me. My opal was gone forever. I thought of my mother, dead, with the opal at her throat. The gem had been, because of this, and because of that long line of mothers and daughters—good women, if history spoke truth—who had in turn worn it, a sacred jewel to me. A wave of sorrow swept over me as I realized that I was never to see it again. I pressed the secret spring of the panel leading into my private oratory, and there knelt down in prayer.

IV

The chill of the Cell struck into the very marrow of my bones, and my knees ached from contact with the cold stone floor. This bodily discomfort was wholesome, freezing out my hot temper. What was the loss of a gem after all? If Lydia and Janey kept tolerably well, and Mr. Braithe ceased to torment them for a few weeks at least, what had I to complain of? Ashamed of my selfishness I remained a half hour longer in the same position as punishment; then, hearing a knock at the door of my room, I rose stiffly and returned there. My visitor was Lilian.

"Finished your genuflections?" she inquired, coming in. "Then swear you'll never tell."

She held toward me a small New Testament, bound in red morocco. A greasy, time-worn little volume, showing signs of a too near neighborhood with Lilian's candle. It had belonged to her mother, and Lilian regarded it as fetich; seldom reading its pages, but keeping it always on her dressing-table, as a safeguard against ghosts.

Often I was called upon to swear by it never to reveal some petty secret. This had become a confirmed habit on her part, and one I found I could not, without great unkindness, break. It had commenced when she was twelve and I seventeen, the formula varying according to my humor of the moment, although what Lilian preferred was this:

"I, Theodora de Vere Braithe, do hereby solemnly swear never to reveal this secret, now confided to my keeping by my step-sister, Lilian de Vere Braithe."

Having determined during my recent stay in the cell to behave well toward all my family, I refrained from answering her petulantly, and took the oath as best pleased her, though secretly wishing she would go away.

"You have sworn, Theo."

"Yes, Lilian."

"You are under oath."

"Yes, yes."

"I could not speak fully to Lydia, Theo, for she is really no relation, but I know in her heart of hearts she feels as I do; for we both know he will never return alive."

"Who?" I demanded, my curiosity slightly aroused by Lilian's pleased excitement, for her cheeks were pink, her eyes shining.

"Who?" Don't be such an idiot, Theo. Father, of course, who else? He has the opal in his breast pocket. It will be his death. And, Theo," lowering her sweet voice to a mere whisper, "I am glad!"

"Lilian!"

"There, you needn't look so shocked, Theo. I am glad, and so's Lydia, though it's really indecent and inhuman in her to be. A common farmer's daughter from Vermont! That's all she was, you know perfectly well. And father made her a Braithe. Oh, I forgot your preference for common people! You needn't fire up—I know all you'll say beforehand. I'm glad I'm an aristocrat, for my part; and can understand the feelings—the finer feelings—of the well born. *Noblesse oblige!* I only hope she'll hang on for a while after father, for you know her annuity dies with her, and it's really all we have to live on. We'll make her take us abroad when he's dead, and—Do you know it's a mercy he carried off the opal, though we were so mad at first, for if anything can fin-

ish him, that will. Leave your room? Oh, come off! You needn't pretend you care for him, after the way he's treated you; that's a little too thin." She laughed musically as she went away.

We had beefsteak for dinner, because it was my birthday. A great treat for the ladies of Braithe. Lilian had offered to take my place as cook—her birthday gift—but she forgot this until reminded by Janey; when, provoked by my reception of her unpleasant prophecy, and disliking the work, she burned the outside of the steak, and left the inside raw. Janey, disappointed that the feast should prove a failure, reproached Lilian bitterly, and the banquet ended in tears.

"Do not marry for love only, Theo," said Lydia, eying the weeping combatants with her cold little smile. "I did; your mother did; Lilian's mother did. Behold the result! Three young female paupers, sodden with grief over the hideous catastrophe of an ill-cooked ewe lamb."

"'Twasn't lamb!" wailed Lilian. "A nasty, gory steak. But it's just like you, you never get things straight."

Lydia's smile deepened.

"Poor Lilian!" she said. "Poor lame dog, without the only crutch that helps such over the stiles of Poverty!

"You mean a sense of humor," said Jane, her tears dried by her warm pride in her own quickness of perception. "You have it only occasionally, Lilian, and you know it." And a second storm was only averted by Lilian's desire to escape dish-washing, which took her hastily from the room.

"Where are you going, Theo?" Lydia asked as, an hour later, Janey climbed into her cart before the front steps. "Ah! I can guess; to the chapel. Wind a wreath of bright leaves for your mother, Theo, and

speak gayly as you lay them on the grass above her heart. You may cheat her into the belief that you are happy."

"I am not unhappy, Lydia."

"No, not unhappy exactly, I suppose. A sad resignation is not to be called unhappiness. How well I have taught you to recognize the limitations of others, Theo! Too well, I fear. Now, understanding mine, you carefully avoid telling me that your mother is a saint in Heaven; not a poor handful of dust, in a narrow coffin. Most people with your faith would not let this occasion pass, but would hasten to proclaim it. Be thankful for your faith, Theo. I wish I might think as you do. I wish I might feel that your mother, happy near God's throne, looks calmly down upon the trials of her only child, believing that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

"Poor little Lydia!" I said, stooping to kiss her pale cheek. "Go take a nice nap; you are overtired. If only I had broiled that steak! A bit of good beef would have done you good. I can't forgive myself for leaving it to Lilian."

"Lilian is a true Braithe," said Lydia, severely, "a mass of selfishness. If it were not for her, I should not mind dying. Something tells me she will do you harm—don't look incredulous, Theo, my premonitions never fail. I dreamed of your mother last night. She stepped down from the gilded frame of her portrait and warned me. I swore to her then, as I swear to you now, to guard you in death, as in life, from all evil. And I so helpless! We feel strong in dreams—I wonder why? But after death one is really strong. I don't believe in God, or in Heaven. If He exists, why does cruelty exist? I do believe in the power to rise from one's grave to help those one loves. If anyone, if Lilian, tries to harm you, they shall have me to deal with."

"O mother, do hush!" cried poor Janey. "You give me the crawling creeps."

I whistled to the Chevalier and hurried away with the child, conscience-stricken. When Lydia began to talk in this odd way she held me, she was so much in earnest. A truly good woman, her lack of faith but a strange warp in her mind. A pitiful, saddening flaw, that was understood and allowed for, I am sure, by One who understands and makes just allowance for us all.

Our road lay southward, through the neglected flower garden—whose old sun-dial was green with moss—on, under the tall trees of the broad belt of woodland beyond; till, a quarter of a mile from the house, we came upon the chapel, amid its encircling tombs. It stood near the edge of the plateau, that here narrowed to a point; and commanded a magnificent view of the river, sweeping southward to the rampart of mountains that apparently barred its further course.

The chapel, like the house, was built of the stone of the locality. Each year it grew more ruinous. Rain leaked in through the roof; and many of the small panes of stained glass in the tall narrow windows were broken, or gone altogether. The bits of thick paper I had carefully glued in their places destroyed the beauty of the pictured saints; here a face was obliterated, there a hand; while the richly-colored garments of the Holy Ones looked as though they had been patched.

Janey and I did not go into the chapel, but sat down on Old Vivian's tombstone—a slab of granite upheld by the family Leopards—and enjoyed the view down the river.

"E. R.," said Jane, meditatively, staring at a modest brownstone cross to our left. "Etienne Rappelle! Three of 'em"—there were three crosses—"I wonder

at their taste, Theo. Do you suppose the present E. R. will be buried here, too?"

"I don't know, Jane."

"To be sure," the child went on, "although he is so awfully rich, he is as common as dirt."

"Janey!" I remonstrated, "don't say such things. You don't know Mr. Rappelle. If he is at all like his ancestors, he is not a common man; but because of his honesty, his loyalty, and unselfishness, a very uncommon one."

"Why, Theo, you don't know him any more than the rest of us! How queer to speak of his ancestors! Somehow I never think of servants having ancestors; or being ancestors. Now you say so, I suppose their grubby old grandfathers are ancestors. I've got no business to talk like this," said the child, blushing painfully, "for I dare say mother's ancestors were as plain as plain. Lilian's forever hinting at it."

"Nice, hard-working, clean-souled Vermont farmers," I said, sternly. "Be thankful you come of such good stock, Jane. Try not to think of people's pedigrees. Judge them by what they are themselves."

"Dear me, Theo, what a funny sermon! You know I don't care a cent about old family, only—only—well, I do think some things about us are interesting; the Portent, for instance."

"O Janey!" I cried, "surely your mother and Lilian did not speak of it to you?"

"You bet they did, Theo, and it most scared me stiff! I hope I mayn't hear it ever. The first faint sound of wheels, stealing through the old lodge gates at midnight—the sound grows louder—down into the valley, and up again—hark! the horses are galloping; the wheels of the Coach reverberate through the quiet night! A mad rush between the Cats, and up to the great door—then, silence!"

"Wheels don't reverberate, Goosie!" I said, hastily. "I wish you wouldn't listen to these foolish tales."

The child paid no heed. Looking down the river with bright, excited eyes she thought only of the Death Coach—the Portent.

"Three days later a Braithe dies. You look from your window—no carriage is there! You say to yourself, which one has it come for? In three days—you know."

"Do not think of it, do not believe in it, Janey, my darling," I entreated. "It is nothing but an idle superstition."

"And the Gypsy's Opal, Theo?"

"Is nothing but a beautiful jewel, Jane. It has no power to bring good, or evil, fortune. Come into the chapel, little sister, and let us pray for each other, and for all whom we love."

"For the people we hate, too, Theo?"

"Let us try not to hate anybody," I said, quickly, painfully conscious of my own fierce dislikes.

The little church smelled of mould, and decay, in spite of my efforts to keep it well aired and dry.

"It's grewsome," complained Janey. "And I'm not a religious child. You're so good, Theo, there's no use in my praying for you; if the Lord God won't look out for you for your own sake, He most certainly won't for mine. Mother's faith is gone, and she'll have to repent to be saved, the Bible says; so where's the use of my praying for her? As for praying for people whom I hope'll have an awful time—the Lord would see through me in a minute. I'm going home; and I think I'm an unfortunate child. If you were like mother, I might believe in all the creepy, crawly, Braithe stories—and enjoy 'em dreadfully; or if mother were like you, I might be an out and out religiousite, and love to pray. Now I'm half one way and half t'other—a kind of

mongrel. Where's the Chevalier? I wish I were a dog. No, I don't, a deformed dog would be horrid. Tell me something pleasant, Theo, quick! My head is full of wicked thoughts, that hurt my heart."

I caught her in my arms and hurried out into the sunshine. If her thoughts hurt her heart, they cut mine to the quick.

"Choose your own story, missy," I cried, gayly, seating her on my lap, "and I'll tell it you. Robber, bogie, fairy, or true story—fearsome or funny? Fancy how full my head is of nonsense!" and I laughed.

"Your pretty ripple laugh," said the child, patting my cheek fondly. Then her mood changed, and a mischievous spirit took possession. "I'll hear the stories of the *pension* swains, from your own self. Tell me of the old English clergyman whom you thought loved you as a daughter, till one day he up and popped the question. Mother says he forgot his cloth—such an odd expression—and cussed and swore like a trooper when you told him what you'd thought. Says 'twas a relief to hear him go it, he was such a sanctimonious old prig. Mother says men are all alike that way; saints have sinners' insides, often, and sometimes sinners' saints—she means have some good in 'em, you know. And I want to hear about the handsome German officer, who put his wedding ring in his pocket so's you wouldn't know he was married, and then tried to make you care for him—bragged he'd do it in a week." She paused, then added, with a wicked little laugh, "Mother says before two weeks were over, he was head over ears in love himself; says he wanted to divorce his wife, and marry you. Forgive me, Theo; I'm nasty to-day; and your birthday, too! I feel just as I do in summer, when a thunder-storm is coming. Yet it's October—and the sky as blue as blue. Let's go home."

Something had affected us all, the loss of the opal,

I fancy, and neither Lydia nor I slept well that night. Just before twelve she came into my room, and finding me awake, sat down on my bed to talk herself into a calmer frame of mind. Presently the old clock at the stables struck the hour.

"Midnight," said Lydia. "What a death-knell voice the old clock has! Hush! What was that?"

"Can it be thunder?" I said. "Why no—it's the sound of wheels!"

Lydia sank back, her hand on her heart, her face ghastly. Alarmed, I sprang from the bed, and would have run for a cordial, but she stopped me.

"Listen!" she gasped, holding up a shaking hand to insure silence.

There was no longer a doubt; someone was driving along the road—once our avenue—at a furious rate.

"Illness at the Gills'!" I exclaimed. "Oh, I am so sorry!" and I listened intently, expecting to hear the carriage, now dashing across the little bridge, turn toward the farm. But it came straight on.

At that moment Lilian ran in.

"Theo, Theo!" she cried, "what shall we do!"

She fell on her knees before me, and buried her white face in the folds of my night-dress. I tried to free myself and get to the window, but she clung to me so desperately I could not move.

"Let me go, Lilian," I commanded, "those horses are on the full gallop! There, they've passed the Leopards! Let me go this instant; someone must be in desperate need."

The carriage stopped before the house, with clatter and rush. Breaking away from Lilian, I ran to my window, and unbolting the old-fashioned shutters, flung them wide.

There was nothing to be seen.

It was a glorious night, and, because of the moon riding proudly in the heavens, seemed like day. Be-

fore the house stretched the broad lawn with its giant elm and tulip trees; beyond, sat the Leopards on their stone pillars, marking the commencement of the avenue of locusts—further still, the woodland of the western hill. Below my window the flight of steps, leading sharply down to the sweep of road in front of the entrance door. I looked and looked again.

"We were mistaken," I said, closing the window and shivering slightly, for the night was chill. "It must have been but some odd echo; there is no carriage here." Then I hastened to Lydia, who sat upon the floor, Lilian's head upon her lap.

"She has fainted, Theo, bring water," she whispered, with colorless lips, and added, as we bathed Lilian's face and throat, "The opal has done its work swiftly! In three days you will be Head of the House."

V

By one of those strange coincidences which do much to strengthen the belief in foolish superstitions, my father lost his life three days later. He was run over by a heavy dray, while trying to drag a child from beneath its wheels, and had died bravely—the crowd applauding.

The news was brought us by our one friend in Hilltown, Dr. Strong. I heard the wheels of his buggy down the avenue, and went joyfully to meet him, but his grave face cut my gay greeting short.

"What has happened?" I asked.

"Theo, my dear child," he said, kindly, as we mounted the steps together, "you must be brave, and help me——"

He got no further, for Lydia appeared on the threshold, her small face pinched and white. As we paused she came forward, holding out a cold little hand.

"Mr. Braithe is dead?" she said, with a wintry smile. "No, I have had no telegram. Word that I might expect this was sent three nights ago."

Alas! it was in vain that I tried to reason away this mischievous belief; and because of the odd effect of an echo, the echo of wheels brought—so I have always fancied—by some rare state of the atmosphere, my dear little step-mother's over-excited nerves did damage to her already feeble health.

All winters were cold at Braithe, we had so few fires; but that winter seemed especially cold, because

Lydia was in great need of warmth, and our supply of fuel scantier even than that of the year before. I had given over my authority as Head of the Family to Lydia, at her request. It was for her to order the felling of trees, and to attend to all the arrangements, although she was not fit for it. Each day she grew more frail, yet she insisted upon keeping everything in her own hands—until the end. Mr. Beecham, my father's lawyer, had gone over all business attendant upon Mr. Braithe's death with her; but we were not to hear the will read until she, too, had left us. There was something very dreadful in her way of putting off everything until then. Later I learned the reason for this.

One heavy envelope, addressed to me in Mr. Braithe's graceful handwriting, Mr. Beecham gave me privately; explaining that my father had requested him to so deliver it in case of his, Mr. Braithe's, death. I opened it with a heavy heart. It contained a letter to me, and two sealed envelopes. On one of these was written:

Concerning Lilian de Vere Braithe.

On the other:

Etienne Rappelle, Esq.

The letter told me that in case Lilian rebelled against my authority, or in any way misdemeaned herself, I was to break the seal of the first envelope and read to her its contents. In case Lydia should survive him, I was, immediately upon her death, to forward the remaining enclosure to Etienne Rappelle, Esq. With it I was desired to send a polite note, explaining that I took pleasure in thus obeying the last commands of my dear father.

"A loving, devoted wife rarely survives her hus-

band long," wrote Mr. Braithe, "and my Lydia, I feel sure, if she does not precede, will soon follow me. Accustomed to her tender care, even Heaven will seem comfortless to me. Should I die first, *I will come* for my dear ministrant *soon*."

Unfortunately Lydia came into my room as I finished reading this letter. It lay upon my lap, and she picked it up saying that she supposed she might read it. What Mr. Braithe had written about her had made little impression upon me; I was absorbed in wondering if he had asked charity for us at the hands of Etienne Rappelle, when a sudden exclamation from her recalled my wandering thoughts. The letter had fallen from her fingers, her face was ghastly.

"Ah!" she whispered, "it is as I feared. Even death cannot release me. He will come for me soon! Theo, I can't stand the thought. To wander through space with him forever and ever and ever!"

Bitterly regretting my forgetfulness of her peculiar beliefs I went to her, and putting my arms around her, said gently:

"Don't be afraid, Lydia; it was always his way to torment you, even in his letters. Try not to think about him any more. He need not come for you," I added, smiling, "for I shouldn't let you go."

"Theo!" she cried, catching my hands in both hers and pressing them hard, a faint pink stealing into her pale cheeks, "Theo! do you really mean it? Would you stand by me? But of course you would; when have you ever deserted a friend or turned away from a soul in trouble? Pray for me, Theo, pray! I ask no Heaven—is there such a place?—but I have lived in Hell, a hell of my own making, so the more awful. Bury me well away from the Braithes, Theo, and remember your promise to put me in no coffin. Pray that I may rest quiet in my grave. If only I might hope to feel your feet, and Janey's, on the grass above

my heart, pressing it down deep into the bosom of stolid Mother Earth—but no, that is not for me." She sank into a chair, exhausted by her terror. "Swear you will pray for me night and morning, Theo."

"I always do, dear Lydia."

"I am hedging," she said, with one of her odd smiles. "I don't believe in what we are taught as children, God and the Angels and that sort of thing, but in case it should prove true after all, I have you on my side to plead for me. I am meaner than a Biblical Jew—an Old Testament Jew! Meaner than Joseph, that tell-tale, who, when he was seventeen years old, ran to his father with evil reports of his brothers; and, later, threw the blame of his own misbehavior on Potiphar's poor wife."

Greatly distressed, I begged her not to talk, to lie down and rest; but she paid no heed.

"If there be a God," she went on more calmly, "He will make allowances—as you do. Yes, as you are making them for me now, and for everybody; for small-souled, envious Lilian, for my poor, pert Janey, for Mrs. Gill and her silly Abel—for everyone save yourself."

"Speaking of Mrs. Gill," I said, anxious to change the current of her thoughts, "reminds me that she is willing to go shares on the wood, as she did last winter. She told me that if you would decide on the trees to be felled, she would set the men to work at once."

For a moment Lydia did not answer, and I saw that the subject I had chosen was an unhappy one. At last she said, very slowly, as though forcing herself to speak. "There will be no more cutting into the timber, Theo."

I stared at her in bewilderment. What, then, should we do for fuel?

"Mr. Beecham and I have talked matters over," she said, drearily. "I am trying to do my best for you, Theo. We must go in debt for coal, I fear."

I felt unwilling to ask questions. I had given up my right to do so; yet one I asked in spite of myself.

"Shall you try to rent or sell Braithe, Lydia?"

"No."

The answer was so short I knew no explanation would follow, and I would not worry her by showing my discomfort over her strange management. Lilian, who thought reticence on any subject in the family circle arrant nonsense, did not hesitate to voice her opinion on the way Braithe was run. She found constant fault, telling what had been done wrong and what should, and should not, be done. If we had no money why not borrow of Etienne Rappelle? she demanded. He really owed his life to the Braithes, she said, for, if the first Etienne had not been rescued by Old Vivian, he would never have been born.

Lydia answered that if he felt as she did about life —that terrible possession—he must owe the Braithes a hearty grudge instead of money. So they wrangled long and bitterly.

"My dear father," said Lilian, "felt as I do, I am sure. When Rappelle came to his funeral, I made up my mind it was to offer us everything we needed; and after all it was only that he might brag of his connection with our family. Vulgar upstart!"

"He had very good manners," said Janey, judicially, "and he is good-looking, aristocratic-looking—aquiline noses are aristocratic," rubbing the bridge of her own delicate little nose reflectively, "but you can't go by looks. Anyone to see you now, Lilian, so piggy-careless, would think you a scullery wench."

"There!" exclaimed Lilian, her sweet voice shrill with anger, "I hope you see now, Lydia, what comes

of letting a brat read Walter Scott's musty old books. Such vile language! No wonder she sees a gentleman in that dark-faced, thin-lipped product of soap and brown sugar! You can read 'grocer' written all over him. Stingy, miserly mushroom!"

"You're mad 'cause he didn't look at you—ogling him over your Prayer-book! It was at Theo he looked—his eyes are as bright and dark—and she so busy minding her prayers she never saw him!"

I got up and went away to my own room. I was tired of the constant squabbling which I could not stop; of Lilian's grumbles over Mr. Rappelle's very natural behavior; of hearing her praises of Mr. Braithe. Since his death she had canonized him. I took from my desk the envelope whose contents concerned her only. I should never break its seal and read them. A record probably of girlish peccadilloes, treasured up against her by Mr. Braithe. Should I burn the letter or give it to her to burn? As I stood idly turning it in my hands Lilian swept into the room without the ceremony of knocking.

"I can't stand those two another minute," she cried, musically, "when I think how they treated dear father! That nasty common little Lydia is evidently thankful he is dead! After all he did for her, too! It is shameful. Never once have I heard her reproach herself for being such a drag upon him, as she certainly was. Sickly, low-born little thing!"

"Hush, Lilian," I said, sternly. "You forget how she toiled for him, you forget that she now supports his children."

"Pooh! If she weren't here Rappelle would do something for us. I daresay he did offer and she has had the impudence to refuse for us—what's that letter? Father's handwriting—even that shows the aristocrat—'Concerning Lilian de Vere Braithe.' Why, Theo! how dare you keep my letter from me? Give

it to me right away," stamping her foot and trying to snatch it from me. "I always knew I was his favorite, the only true Braithe of the family. Give it to me!"

I tried to explain that it was not for her. Beside herself with anger, she would not listen, and fought for its possession so violently that I gave it up. She broke the seal and devoured its contents, then burst into passionate tears. "Mean, hateful, wicked!" tearing the letter as she spoke. "Devilish old sneak! I'm glad he's dead! I hope he's burning, yes, burning in torments, I do, I do, I do!"

"Lilian!" I cried, aghast, "how can you talk so?"

"You're just as bad," turning fiercely upon me; "setting yourself to pry into my private affairs. Always asking about my visit to uncle, and I such an idiot I never guessed why! Ah!" stopping short and staring fixedly at me, "you read it first, then sealed it up again."

"Enough!" I was now as angry as she. "Leave my room at once, please."

She did so, but was back again in an instant, bringing the little New Testament.

"Swear you didn't, then, Theodora de Vere Braithe. Swear!"

At first I would not, but at last, my anger conquered by the look of real misery in her eyes, I yielded, and she went away satisfied. But she no longer spoke of Mr. Braithe with affectionate regret.

Her allusion to her visit set me wondering for the hundredth time over her reticence in regard to it. I had before imagined that it was because of her failure to inherit the wealth she had hoped for, that she so seldom spoke of the months spent in the home of her great-uncle; her mother's uncle, so no kin of the Braithes. Yet, strangely enough, it was our Braithe cousin, Herbert Braithe Fayne, the only child of my

father's only sister who had been, apparently, her sole rival for the old man's favor.

"Had I wife and children of my own," the great-uncle had said in the presence of clergyman and lawyer, "every cent should go to them. Now, one moment I'm all for the girl—the next, I remember that the boy is the orphaned grandson of my closest friend. I suppose I must choose between the two!"

After his death it was found that he had a wife and children tucked away in a distant corner of the county, so Lilian and Herbert got nothing.

Although as a child Lilian had detested Herbert, and he had never noticed her save when inclined to tease, she corresponded with him after this visit; yet she seemed to like him no better than before, and save for saying that he was "as handsome and as nasty as ever," never would talk about him. Her outburst over Mr. Braithe's communication aroused my curiosity again, but I put it away resolutely. Lilian's affairs were her own.

VI

Lydia was never quite the same after reading Mr. Braithe's letter, seeming to live in constant dread of his summons, and in February she became seriously ill. Kind Dr. Strong drove the seven miles from Hilltown almost daily, in spite of the bad condition of the roads. His wife loaded the buggy with dainties, made to tempt Lydia's failing appetite, but little Jane ate most of them. Poor child, she needed them almost as much as her mother!

Fuel at this time became very scanty. I had no money with which to buy coal, and dared not order any trees cut down. In Lydia's weak condition lay a bar to all discussion of ways and means, yet she must have a fire in her room. What to do I did not know, and one morning when an hour spent in prayer in the icy Cell of Flagellation had brought no help, I went to the chapel in hope of finding aid there. An answer was sent to my prayers, for, my eyes chancing to fall upon a very large moth-hole in the covering of one of the pew cushions, I saw, not for the first time, that they were stuffed with straw. In renovating the chapel at the time of his marriage to my mother, Mr. Braithe had thought any kind of stuffing would do—seeing stuffing did not show. Horse-hair being expensive, straw was used.

Remembering to have read that Western farmers twisted hay into tight ropes and burned it, I saw my way to making Lydia comfortable. Picking up a long cushion, whose covering was sadly moth-eaten, I threw it across my shoulder and bore it to the stables.

There I stripped off the cover, and, at imminent risk to my fingers and toes, for I am not good at man's work, hacked the closely-packed straw into burnable lengths and placed several chunks in a basket. Then I went to the library for a book with which to start the fire, for we took no newspaper, and shavings we had not.

The library was icy cold, making Lydia's room, directly over it, the harder to warm. It occupied the lower part of the north wing of the house, and having one huge window to the east, another to the west, it commanded a view of both avenue and river. Over the great chimney-piece hung a portrait of the builder of Braithe, Old Vivian, taken as himself. There were many other portraits of him in the house, in which he had sat for his ancestors, having been unable to carry off their pictures from the English Braithe Manor. The story ran that he had declared himself to be a very perfect type of the race, and well fitted to personate the best of them. Thus was Braithe House provided with the needed family portraits.

Hastily selecting a book I thought worthless, I took a short cut upstairs by way of what had been my father's private staircase, whistling cheerily as I went that Lydia's nerves might not be startled. The library had always been the peculiar property of the masters of Braithe. Back of its great chimney, in the northern end, there was hidden a small room, with a spiral staircase in one corner that led to a dressing-room above. This dressing-room opened into Lydia's bedchamber. In winter my father had slept in the small room, as it could be made very hot with its little stove, in spite of the northern exposure. A bookcase swung to one side, on touching a secret spring, and gave entrance to it. Braithe was unpleasantly full of reminders of those who had stood in need of hiding-places.

My straw burned bravely; Lydia fancied it must

be like peat. She looked very little in the big, old-fashioned, four-post bedstead. Everything in the great room was large and heavy. Somehow the ponderous furniture, calculated, apparently, to last forever, made Lydia seem the more fragile.

"Strange girl!" she said, her odd smile flickering about her lips, "robbing the church to keep me warm. Like the rest of us you are inconsistent."

"I hope I mayn't burn a family of mice," I said, anxiously. "Do they hibernate, Lydia?"

"There it is again," said Lydia, "catching them in traps, jumping up on chairs and screaming when they run across the floor, yet now fearing to kill by fire."

There was silence for a moment. I was in constant dread of hearing despairing squeaks from the fire. Lydia watched me.

"Would you burn the Bible, Theo, if no other fuel were to be had?"

"Yes, Lydia."

"To keep me or Janey warm, I know you would, but how about yourself, Theo?"

"Oh, I am strong, Lydia," I said, uneasily. "I am always warm."

"Very," ironically, "very warm, with frost-bitten fingers and toes! But you are of no consequence ever to yourself. Strange, strange girl! Truly religious, yet to get warmth for me or Janey you would coax the Devil into giving you a brazier of coals from Hell. And cheat him, later, out of his just demand for your soul."

"Satan is always cheated, Lydia."

"The worst of it is no one is worth the trouble taken about them; I'm not, my poor Jane is not. It's absurd when you really ponder on the subject," she went on, "the fuss man makes about man. Men brag about the great inventions made—what do they amount to after all? A cable laid across the ocean—

for what purpose, pray? To carry twaddling messages for men! The great world swings on through space—who may stop its course? Not that wretched pygmy, Man. 'I chain the lightning,' he cries; and the next moment lies withered and dead by its power."

The door was gently opened and Janey entered. She held one hand behind her as she advanced slowly into the room; she had on coat and hat and had evidently just come in the house.

"Guess what I have for you, Theo."

I laughed. "A snow-ball, Pet?"

"A present from an admirer, Theo," she said, smiling. "But his heart it is another's—by rights, that is. What queer things men's hearts are, flying about like mad!"

"What do you know about hearts, Goosie?" I demanded. "Come and guess in your turn what our fire is made of."

Janey's curiosity was aroused and she ran to me. As she did so Lydia cried out in horror:

"Janey! Peacock's feathers! Where did you get them, why did you bring them here? Throw them into the fire this moment; burn them, quick!"

"Why, mummy!" exclaimed the child, half frightened, half displeased, "they're so pretty, why must I burn them? Mr. Gill gave them to me. He told me to show them to my sister, Theo"; her eyes began to sparkle, "he really meant them for you, Theo; you take them," and she thrust the bunch of graceful plumes into my hand.

"They bring bad luck," cried Lydia, sitting up in bed. "I won't have them in the house; wrap them in paper and put them in the fire."

Janey climbed up on the high bed. "Let me keep them," she pleaded, and she kissed her mother. Unfortunately her veil fell over her face as she did so.

"Kissing me through your veil!" wailed Lydia.

"Oh, what more is in store for us? First those omens of ill luck"—the poor feathers were now in the fire—"and then you must forget how often I have told you not to kiss me when your veil is down. O Janey, Janey, what have you done?"

"It's all gone now, Lydia, the bad luck, I mean," I said, hastily; "the feathers are in ashes. Jane didn't mean to disobey you."

"What's all this about disobeying?" asked Lilian, strolling in. "Lydia busily engaged in ruling the rost, as usual? Doesn't it ever strike you that you're fearfully stuck on yourself, Mrs. Braithe? What?" as an explanation followed, "peacock's feathers? Great heavens! How long will it be, I wonder, before Theo and Jane realize that you know what you're about and that they don't?"

These superstitious fancies wore upon Lydia, and often, through her, upon my healthy nerves; I grew so fearful of doing something that she might consider unlucky.

One night during the last week of that month—February—we were all waked at midnight by the howling of a dog under Lydia's window. She was very much terrified, thinking the sound betokened the approach of death—so feared now because of her husband's threat. The moon had just risen and, though obscured every few moments by light clouds, for a storm was brewing, gave sufficient light for me to see that the black object squatting on the snow far below was the Gills' half-grown puppy, Jumbo. This I told Lydia, thinking to calm her excited fancy, but she said he had been "sent."

"Dear Lydia, the poor dog is probably cold and hungry," I said, "and is howling to tell us so. He has strayed from home."

I dressed and went downstairs to let him in. To my surprise he did not want to come. He let me pat

him, but took up his mournful plaint again the moment I stopped, so I gathered him up around the middle and toiled with him up the steps into the house. His long hind legs, limp and floppy, dragged after him, for though but a pup he was big; he yelped in protest and licked my face, alternately, all the way. The Chevalier, shut into Lilian's room to prevent a quarrel, barked angrily, but in spite of the turmoil all might have gone well had not Lilian's desire to see what was going on induced her to open her door on a crack, when out the Chevalier squeezed and was upon Jumbo in an instant. I had just set the pup down at the head of the staircase and Charles Stuart's sudden rush sent them rolling down it together. Then I heard the front door—yet I was sure I had shut it—jar to heavily, and again Jumbo began his lugubrious song.

If I had had time to take him into Lydia's room and to warm and feed him there, I think both she and the puppy might have spent a comfortable night. As it was both were wretched. Jumbo would not let me catch nor drive him from the house, but stayed and howled till dawn. By morning poor Lydia was alarmingly ill.

There followed a three-days' storm, breaking up the ice in the river and piling it in mighty heaps along shore. Dr. Strong came to us on the second day, his bushy eyebrows and whiskers covered with ice from his long drive in the teeth of the wind. He looked very grave over Lydia and did what little he could for her, saying he would get to us the next day, if possible. She was so much brighter then, however, that I was glad when he failed to come, knowing how busy he was elsewhere and how weary.

That night, in spite of the wild noises of the storm, I slept soundly on my lounge at the foot of Lydia's bed, my anxiety being, for the time, over. But at

twelve she roused me and I went to her. She was sitting up in bed, her eyes fixed upon the panel which gave entrance to my father's dressing-room; a look of great dread was in them, and her small, pinched face was gray.

"Listen!" she whispered, holding up a wasted hand. "Don't you hear him in the library?" From the room below came an odd, muffled sound, as of footsteps that echoed dully. "O Theo," turning to me suddenly, "hold me! Don't let me go!"

I got up beside her, wrapped her warm and held her close in my arms.

"Only the noises of the storm, dear Lydia," I said, soothingly. "Lean against me and try to be calm."

Far to the northward, away up the river, we heard the roar and cry of the approaching blast.

"Pray for me," cried Lydia, clinging to me in frantic terror. "I hear him on the spiral stairway—Theo, Theo, pray!"

A passionate pity for this suffering, born of superstition, filled my heart. I began to chant the Creed; to fight the unreal with the real:

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord."

An ecstasy, such as is at rare intervals vouchsafed to us poor mortals, swept over me, possessed me. The storm rushed down upon us, shaking the house, rattling doors and windows, making the old trees creak with its violence. I scarcely heeded, for to me it seemed as if the heavens had parted, flooding all with an effulgent radiance—the radiance of the great White Throne.

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty," I chanted, exultingly, *"and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord."*

Then, very slowly, I came back to earth. I saw the

feeble glimmer of night-lamp and fire reflected in the shining surface of the ponderous mahogany furniture; and I saw, with a start of apprehension, that the panel leading into the dressing-room had jarred aside. Then I felt the utter abandonment of the fragile little creature in my arms.

"Lydia!" I whispered. "Dear Lydia, you feel better now?"

Her head lay upon my breast, her arms across my shoulders.

"He opened the panel," she faltered, shuddering; "he looked in; but he dared not enter—because of your great faith. And I?" her voice grew steadier, stronger, "Lord, I believe—help Thou mine unbelief!"

I laid her back among her pillows. I thought she slept. But in the morning she did not waken.

VII

Although I had known for many months that Lydia's time on earth was short, her death was a great shock to me. I missed my kind little step-mother sadly. Poor Janey was almost heart-broken, and even Lilian, I think, felt her loss more than she said.

Mindful of my promise, I had carried out Lydia's wishes in regard to her last resting-place. I put her in no coffin, but, instead, made her a couch of the fir and the hemlock; lining the damp grave with their lightest branches, selecting the slenderest, the most yielding. Upon this rude bed I laid her tenderly, with reverent care, and covered her close with the silken folds of the Flag. Lydia believed that to sleep beneath our glorious symbol of the highest ideals that man has ever striven to live up to must bring a grand repose.

"I shall rest better—if allowed to rest—with the Stars and Stripes around me," she had said. "But should I rise to protect you from evil, Theo, as rise I shall, I swear, should you need me, I will come in my shroud. Then, returning, knowing that in death I have achieved what in life was denied me—for I have done nothing for you, Theo—I may again fold the Flag close to my heart, and so sleep."

Ten days after I had said good-by to her Mr. Beecham came to Braithe. It was in the morning, and we were in the dining-room, where glowed a comforting fire, owing to the kindness of Dr. Strong, who had sent us a load of coal. Lilian had curled herself up in a ragged easy-chair drawn close to the chimney side,

and was absorbed in an old novel. Her shabby slippers toasted on the hearth. One foot she sat on; the other, dangling free, looked piebald because of the many holes in her black stocking.

I busied myself cutting out a frock for little Jane from an old gown of her mother's. As I snipped and twisted serge and pattern, my mind sought anxiously for an answer to the problem given it. How might Lilian and I find work? We must not continue to live upon charity, I thought, glancing at the fire in the high, old-fashioned grate, yet what could we do? Until we could sell Braithe Manor we must earn our own living, and I feared a purchaser for so large and isolated an estate might be hard to find.

We were not well educated. Poor Lydia had had too much to do after the birth of little Jane, and the child's subsequent misfortune, to spend much time in teaching her step-daughters; and Mr. Braithe had vowed he would waste no more money in hiring governesses for a brace of useless girls. Save for the little I had learned by reading everything that came in my way, and a slight knowledge of languages picked up in Europe, I knew absolutely nothing; Lilian, poor thing, still less.

My mind, instead of concentrating itself upon the little frock taking outline upon the table, insisted upon attending not only to the work in hand, but to our future as well. As I worked I saw, in imagination, all the lions that might confront us on our way.

I looked at the child, perched on the other end of the table, busily committing a chapter of the Bible to memory. She had announced her intention of learning it all by heart that she might understand religion; but had begun in the middle of the book to avoid discouragement. Little Jane, who must be left in charge of strangers while I went out into the world to seek

fortune for her! There came an ache in my heart, I could not see the little frock. My Janey, my little sister, how could I part from her; how find for her the care she needed?

"I'm not naturally religious, Theo," she said, suddenly, breaking in upon my musings. "I'm afraid I'll always be a kind of make-believe." She sighed, then cried, excitedly, "Look, Theo, look quick! Here comes someone up the avenue! Lilian, Lilian, wake up! Put on your slippers, do; a carriage is coming."

When Mr. Beecham entered, Lilian and Janey ran away, that I might be left to deal with business matters alone. Of this I did not approve, for I thought he came to read Mr. Braithe's will, so, after the usual ceremonies of greeting were over, I spoke to him of this. He had taken up his position on the hearth-rug, his back to the fire, and stood looking meditatively at me. He was a gray man; complexion, eyes, lips, hair—all were gray. He had a pompous manner.

"It was kind of you to come, with the roads in so bad a condition, Mr. Beecham," I began, seeing he seemed disinclined for speech. "We are to hear my father's will, I suppose."

"Of course, Miss Braithe," he said in his slow way, "if that is your wish; otherwise it is, in this case, unnecessary."

"But why?" I asked.

Poor Mr. Beecham! No wonder that he had hesitated about beginning so trying an interview. He was a kind man, and his news was hard to tell; for we were completely destitute. Mr. Braithe had had nothing to leave. Braithe Manor had passed from his hands years before, and now belonged to Etienne Rappelle. It was Etienne Rappelle's roof that had sheltered us since our return from Europe—Etienne Rappelle's trees that I had wished to have cut down and burned; Lydia had prevented me, and I was grateful.

She had known of this since Mr. Braithe's death, and had spared me the knowledge. Tender-hearted little Lydia!

I felt as though the solid earth were giving way beneath my feet. Where were we to stay while looking for work? How get enough money to live on till then? I was frightened. Would Mr. Beecham help me? I asked him.

"It is exceedingly difficult, Miss Braithe," he said, gravely, in his slow, pompous way, "for young gentlewomen to obtain the means of support. There are, unfortunately, so many striving for situations as governesses, companions, housekeepers, and the like. I have one young friend who has been desirous of obtaining employment for the past seven months; but, owing to an imperfection in her education, she is debarred from the position of teacher; and people prefer employing persons of the middle class as housekeepers. May I ask what you think of applying for?"

My heart had sunk lower and lower during his little speech. What was I fitted for, indeed? I told him what I knew, and what I was capable of doing.

"I fear," he said, "that people would rather engage natives of France and Germany to teach their children those languages. I doubt if you may hope to succeed as a teacher, Miss Braithe; and as to obtaining a position as housekeeper or companion——" He paused again.

"I think I might do well enough as one of these," I said, pleadingly. But once more he shook his head.

"Forgive my saying so, my dear young lady, but you are too young."

"I am twenty-three," I interrupted quickly, "and in reality much older. I am not a young woman in experience, Mr. Beecham."

"Allow me," he said, waving my words aside with

his hand, "too young, and far too handsome," bowing gravely, "to obtain either situation easily, if—if at all."

I sat still, tongue-tied by despair. Mr. Beecham stood and viewed my misery without seeming to have any suggestion to offer.

"How is your little sister, Miss Jane?" he asked, after the silence had lasted for some time.

"She is always about the same, thank you," I said, wearily.

"Has she had the best medical advice?"

I thought his question a trifle unkind, under the circumstances; but reminded myself that he probably felt embarrassed, his position being an unpleasant one, and answered the tactless query gently.

"No, so far, not."

"You sent a letter to Mr. Etienne Rappelle directly upon the demise of Mrs. Braithe, did you not?"

I answered in the affirmative. Lydia had worried over this letter, left by my father for Mr. Rappelle, until I had given my promise to send it. I had disliked doing so extremely. What might the letter contain? Something disagreeable, judging from the others. The color surged hotly into my cheeks, in expectation of what I might have to hear. Had Mr. Braithe expressed his long-concealed hatred in that letter? Had he—but no—he could not have asked charity for us; our future had never been his care.

Meanwhile Mr. Beecham was fumbling in his pocket, and presently drew from it a parcel, which he placed in my hands.

"Before delivering a—a message, with which I am intrusted," he said, pompously, but withal very kindly, "may I beg you to receive this?"

Seeing that I was expected to open it, I did so, and found the beautiful mother-of-pearl case that had always been the resting-place of my opal. With trem-

bling fingers I pressed the spring. Inside lay not only my lost gem, but its diamond chain as well.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Mr. Beecham, stooping down, glasses on nose to see better, "a beautiful jewel. And, as I understand, with a most interesting history. Handed down, I believe, from mother to eldest daughter for many generations. Permit me to congratulate you upon its recovery—for it is yours again."

Then, gathering himself together, he told me, in as few words as possible, that in any case the opal was mine, since the sender, Etienne Rappelle, would decline to take it back; but that he, Mr. Rappelle, hoped that I might consent to become his wife.

I sat quite still, feeling as though I were in a bad dream; while Mr. Beecham, sighing deeply as if thankful that the most difficult part of his mission was over, went on more cheerfully with his task.

"If you will agree to this arrangement, my dear Miss Braithe," he said, "things will naturally right themselves, as is highly desirable, and Braithe Manor will still be in the family."

"But I don't know Mr. Rappelle," I cried. "I have never even seen him!" Then, as is my wont, because of Lydia's training, rapidly viewing his side of the question, I added, "I am sure he is only doing this from a sense of duty. I thank him, Mr. Beecham, I am grateful, please tell him so, but what he proposes is out of the question. As for the opal I accept it with heart-felt thanks. It was like a true Rappelle to send it—but it must be sold. Perhaps you will attend to this for me, Mr. Beecham, and we can live upon what it brings for a time."

"Not very long," he said, shaking his head. "And allow me to say that Mr. Rappelle has seen you, Miss Braithe, if you did not see him. It was at your father's funeral. He is a fine man, a strictly honorable

man. I should advise you to reconsider your answer, Miss Braithe."

It was my turn to shake my head, but Mr. Beecham, all his pomposity of speech suddenly gone, began his task, self-imposed, of persuading me to do what he thought my duty. He spoke well, that I could not deny, reminding me of my obligation, as Head of the Family, toward my sisters. It was for me, he urged, to protect and provide for them, so far as I was able. Of Janey, and her need of constant, watchful care—care only to be given by one who loved her—and the necessity of good medical advice, he spoke long and earnestly; of Janey, who, all unconscious, was at that moment pleading her own cause. For her childish treble, piping high, reached us in the dining-room, as she went singing through the hall; changing the words of an old verse to suit her fancy as she sang.

> "Oh, poverty is disconsolate;
> Its wants are many, many, many—
> Its woes are strong—foes are strong—
> Woes and foes, both are strong."

The big tears welled up into my eyes and rolled slowly down my cheeks.

"There, there," said Mr. Beecham, suddenly breaking off in his harangue, "don't take it so hard, my dear. Ah! what a remarkable gem that is; a moment ago it was so very brilliant, and now it is almost white. No, I am mistaken, the color sweeps across its surface. And I am glad to see that the red of the rose," bowing in his old-fashioned way, "is once more rivalled in your cheeks. Does that mean you will decide sensibly, Miss Braithe? Rappelle is in every way a suitable match, very suitable; not yet forty—and a strictly honorable man. I think you may safely trust yourself to him."

"Oh, I have faith in Mr. Rappelle, as far as that goes," I said, trying to smile—I was sorry for Mr.

Beecham. "If he really wishes it—you may say to him——" I broke down and began to cry outright. Janey's song had decided me; I would take up the cross ready for my shoulders. I believed a loveless marriage to be a crime; but I must try to forget my own soul, my own distaste, my own happiness. Janey came first now, as always.

"Let me see," said Mr. Beecham, hurrying into his coat as though anxious to be off before I had time to change my mind, "to-day is Saturday. Rappelle sails on Wednesday—business in London—no, my dear, you are not to accompany him. Tuesday he must be in town, business appointments. He suggests Monday noon. Now, my dear Miss Braithe, just one moment before you speak, how else can he be in the proper position to provide for you? A most sensible arrangement. Yes, yes, gives you time to become accustomed to—to—in short," desperately, "to everything. I'll see Dr. Strong and tell him the happy news. I believe from my heart," he spoke solemnly, holding out his hand in farewell, "that you will never have cause to regret your decision."

I strove to smile through my tears.

"Whatever happens, Mr. Beecham," I faltered, "I shall always be sure that you tried to advise me for the best. I thank you for being so kind."

"Good-by, my dear," he said, hurriedly, "and—and God bless you!" He wrung my hand hard and hurried away.

I stood still where he had left me. Surely the lightning had struck. The great opal, shimmering in its coil of dull gold, looked up at me like a big eye. Why, I wondered, even at the moment of accepting it and when boldly declaring that I should sell it, had I known in my inmost heart that this must not be? Was it because of the large sum probably already paid for the gem by Etienne Rappelle? It was his jewel

by rights now. What had become of that money? Gambled away, no doubt, in a single night—wasted in dissipation. How could Mr. Rappelle wish to marry a Braithe? But did he really wish it? Could it be possible that the old oath had been forced upon him by his father? If so, why had he not simply offered to help us instead of proposing marriage? My head ached, my heart was sick within me; God help me to do my duty—it was so hard, so very hard!

Hearing my sisters coming I closed the case of the opal, and put it on the high chimney-piece, beneath the portrait of Lady Sophia Braithe—an earl's daughter—the wife of Vivian, my great-great-great-grandfather, builder of the American Braithe. The Lady Sophia was a blonde beauty. Lilian resembled her closely, save that Lady Sophia's chin bespoke a more determined will. Perhaps at thirty Lilian might look more like her ancestress; I hoped most earnestly she might never be like her in any other way, for the Lady Sophia had not been a good woman.

To Lilian those who looked down upon us from their carved or gilded frames were merely shadows; unnoticed unless, the light burning dim at late hours of the night, a fear of them as ghosts sent her scurrying past each portrait, with pale cheeks and averted eyes, when on her way to bed. To me these dead and gone men and women were very real. Having no superstitious fancies I did not fear their wraiths, but the stories of their evil doings saddened me. I sometimes found myself looking wearily into the blue eyes of the Lady Sophia, and, as her descendant, judging her. How had she dared to be so wicked? I thought the reason I cared so little for Braithe House was because of those who had lived beneath its roof; and who—so it seemed to me—had but just passed over its threshold to the neighborhood of the chapel beyond the garden.

Braithe had been built by one of them, and its atmosphere still seemed tainted by their presence.

"Well," demanded Lilian, coming in, "have we anything? Is there a cent left?"

"Theo!" cried Janey, pushing her aside, "you have been crying." And running to me she threw her arms —how thin they were!—around my neck.

"It is nothing, pet," I said, soothingly; then, in answer to Lilian, "We shall not want, Lilian, for," the words were hard to manage, "for—I am to marry Etienne Rappelle."

"What?" cried Lilian, in a musical scream. "It's not possible!"

I bowed my head in reply; I could not speak. A wild-rose flush stained Lilian's pale cheeks, and kicking off her slippers she began to dance lightly and gracefully about the room, clapping her hands in time to the wild gyrations.

"Hurrah, hurrah, I'll yell a jubilee!"

she sang, and never had her voice sounded sweeter,

"Hurrah, hurrah, for the chap what sets us free!
Join me in the chorus, for grocers we will be,
Grocers—from this time forward!"

"Stop, Lilian!" commanded Janey, stamping her foot. "Wicked, wicked girl! O Theo, my Theo," clasping me closer, and kissing my cheeks again and again, "your poor heart is hurt! Why must you marry him? If one of us has to, why won't Lilian do? She wants to marry; she's always said she would marry a rich man; let her do it. You and I were to live alone together, Theo, just us two. Let Lilian marry him."

Lilian had paused to listen.

"You hear what Janey suggests, Lilian?" I said, looking at her wistfully. "I think she is right about

Mr. Rappelle"—I did not believe the love-at-first sight theory advanced by Mr. Beecham—"I think that he wishes, merely, to marry one of the Braithes, in order to help the family. If you don't mind, won't you take him?"

The color faded from Lilian's cheeks.

"How mean of you!" she cried. "How nasty, and mean, and hateful! You know I can't——"

"You mean you won't," Jane interrupted, indignantly.

I hastened to avert a storm.

"Of course if you would rather not, Lilian," I said. Then, taking the opal from the chimney-piece, "see, this has come home."

"The Gypsy's Opal!" said Lilian, in an awed whisper. "The diamond chain! O Theo!"

"Pretty, pretty gem!" said little Jane, touching it caressingly with one small finger. "See how its color comes and goes! It flushes and pales with you, Theo. Does little mummy know of it, do you think? It would please her so."

"The Opal—and the Rappelle millions!" said Lilian. She had an odd, frightened look. "Even you, Theo, must confess that your luck and the opal are one."

I said nothing. Luck, indeed! But there are two kinds.

Lilian smiled, recovering without apparent effort her wild spirits of the moment before. The pretty color returned to her pale cheeks as she said good-naturedly, nodding at Jane:

"You see I can't marry him because he don't want me, little Goose; and won't for the same reason—he's in love with Theo."

Again she began to sing, and little Jane, fascinated, though disapproving, watched her as she drifted lightly about the room, swaying with the rhythm of the music.

"My aunt La Mode, from the city,
Came out for the country air;
She thought my cheeks were painted,
And asked who made my hair?
And when she learned it grew there,
She called for ink and pen.
She made her will and bought me
For one of the Upper Ten."

She ceased singing, stood still an instant, then nodded her graceful head at wide-eyed Janey, and saying, "Now for the true version," recommenced her song:

"Grocer Rappelle, from the city,
Came out for a funeral affair;
He thought Miss Braithe's cheeks painted,
Quoth he, 'Who made that hair?'
But when he learned both grew there,
He hied to his grocery, then
Planked down his check, and bought her,
To the tune of millions ten."

"Lilian!" cried Janey. Swept by a storm of indignation, and with cheeks aflame, eyes flashing, her small hand uplifted to strike the offender, she would have flown at Lilian had I not caught and held her.

"There, Jane, come to; I didn't mean anything," said Lilian.

The child and I both stared in amazement. Never had we seen Lilian in a mood of apology before.

"Of course he fell in love with her at the funeral. I'll put it elegantly, if you prefer," she went on, taking up her position on the hearth-rug, her back to the fire. She looked more like the Lady Sophia than ever before, I thought, as I glanced from one to the other. "He looked, naturally enough, at our family group; and, Jane Braithe, you and I 'weren't in it for a minit.' For he saw a graceful girl, five feet five in height—but looking taller because of regal shoulders, and the proud carriage of her well-shaped head." Jane's sigh

of satisfaction echoed through the lofty room; again she was absorbed. "A velvet girl. Her slumbrous waves of dusky hair—black velvet. Her large, soft eyes—eyes passionate or mirthful, pathetic or simply pellucid lakes, as the mood of their owner changes—gray velvet, daytimes; black velvet for evening wear."

"That's so!" from Jane.

"A skin like white velvet," continued Lilian in solemn declamation, "save where, in the perfectly rounded oval of that high-bred face, the rich color comes and goes. Now a stain of deepest carmine, and now a wondrous pink. 'Those eyebrows were surely pencilled with a brush of velvet!' sighs the Billionaire. Miss Braithe smiles—slowly. (Mr. Gill has just picked up her handkerchief; held in her hand for looks' sake. No tears on account of dear pa's demise dampen its snowy folds.)"

"Lilian!" cries Janey, really shocked.

"Shall I stop?" Lilian asks.

"N-o"—Poor Jane is a little ashamed of her interest. And I, I am but too thankful to have the child's mind kept from serious thoughts, to yield to my own desire to stop what is very cruel nonsense to me.

"Where was I, Jane?" from Lilian.

"Gill has just picked up her handkerchief, and she's smiling." It is evidently but a fairy tale to the child.

"Oh, yes. Theo smiles—a slow, strange smile; a somewhat languorous smile. Tantalizing dimples appear suddenly in those velvet cheeks; the carmine is beautiful, so rich. Is there, or is there not, the Grocer asks himself, a dimple also in that wonderfully alluring chin? He stares at her with might and main; he can't make out; probably because of a grain of starch, or rice, in his right-hand optic. Says he to himself, 'I'll have that girl if I bust the bank to get her! I'll dress her in velvet and then'—— In his lordly im-

agination he puts a hand under that velvet chin, and lifts it; he must see if there be a dimple there or not. (And what matter if the hand is a trifle gritty with brown sugar, and slightly scented with cheese——" I could bear no more.

"Lilian, O Lilian!" I exclaimed, in a sudden agony.

Janey, turning, fixed her great blue eyes upon my pallid face. Then, in a very passion of pity, flung her arms around my neck, and crying out, "O Jephthah's daughter! Oh, the early Christian martyrs!" burst into wild tears of self-reproach.

I felt that I must put an end to this strange scene at once—that there must be no more disrespect shown by Lilian toward the Rappelle, who, like his grandfathers, was sacrificing himself for a Braithe. I unclasped the child's arms from about my neck; and, still holding one of her little hands in mine, laid my right hand, for support, upon the Bible, lying open upon the table before me. I was scarcely conscious that its pages were beneath my fingers, so shaken was I by what I had undertaken. I found it, somehow, very hard to hold myself erect, as I stood facing Lilian —and the Lady Sophia Braithe.

"I have promised to marry Etienne Rappelle," I said very slowly, striving hard to keep my voice steady and to force back the tears that blurred the faces of Lilian and the Lady Sophia. "And I shall try to prove to him that a Braithe can be loyal to a Rappelle. I shall swear before God to love and to obey him, till death us do part." I was silent for a long moment, then, looking no longer at Lilian, but straight into the cold blue eyes of my great-great-great-grandmother, I said, still more slowly, "I now swear that I shall strive to keep my vow, no matter what Etienne Rappelle chooses to do or not to do. The wheel of change has swung around. The Braithes have ruled their superiors long enough; it is time the Rappelles assumed, as

such, their rightful place. I shall, doubtless, be very happy as the wife of so honorable, so well-born a man as Etienne Rappelle."

I had expected an outburst of disapproval from Lilian, just as I had hoped for, and rejoiced to hear, a deep sigh of relief from Janey. The child believed my last statement, as I had intended she should. Lilian, however, running quickly to me, pressed my hand down firmly upon the page of Scripture on which it rested, then lifting it, she read aloud the verses that had lain beneath my finger tips:

"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

"Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

"And I had hoped for a favorable omen!" sighed Lilian. "Nothing but rubbish after all."

But little Jane, searching carefully with one small finger, found the verses, and bending low her golden head kissed them reverently.

I went quickly from the room.

VIII

"Marry on Monday, marry for wealth!" quoted Lilian, surveying me with cold disapproval. "Well, your gown is proof positive that it is necessary. Such an old dud! I hate thin India silks at their best, and yours has been washed so many times it's simply hideous—such an ugly yellow white. It's a mercy Mrs. Gill fell upon your sleeves, or they'd be indecently flat. Wasn't she too common? I can hear her twangy voice now as she said, 'Not sew on Sunday, Miss Theo? Is that the reason you won't make 'em buffant? I want to know! I go to church pretty regularly, I guess, but when my ox falls down inter a pit, why, I jest stay home an' haul him out; so now I'll run and get a pattren.' Well, she did fairly—considering," walking around me. "You'll have to do, I suppose; but I must say you're the shabbiest bride I ever saw!"

The mirror vouched for Lilian's truthfulness. The sleeves—poor Mrs. Gill's handiwork—were short, just big puffs, and had been made from bits of the old long ones; every piece showed. The corsage of the gown was cut square; and close about my throat was clasped the diamond chain, with its pendant. But the opal looked dull; as dull as my white face and tired eyes.

I had slept little since Mr. Beecham's visit. I had passed the two nights—such long yet such short nights—in tears. I had dree'd my weird hard. My sole consolation lay in the knowledge that I came, on my father's side, of a short-lived race. The Braithes married and died young. Mr. Braithe was wont to boast

of the number of greats put before the name of old Vivian—so-called, although he had passed away when he was thirty-five—who yet had not built Braithe House until late in seventeen hundred.

During these wakeful nights I had concluded finally and, as I thought, forever, that I was being married because of the power of the old oath; that Etienne Rappelle had felt it impossible to help us in any other way, and, having sworn to "stand by the family," was about to sacrifice his personal freedom for the sake of this foolish vow. And I must help him to consummate this sacrifice!

As I stood staring at my pale reflection in the mirror, a carriage drove slowly up to the house. A wave of color swept across the face in the glass, and the great opal showed a crimson stain in its heart.

"Dr. and Mrs. Strong," announced Lilian, running to look from the window. "They are bringing in box after box! O Theo! a basket of champagne," and she rushed downstairs. A moment later she reappeared, followed by the doctor's wife, a plump, cheerful little woman. Both were laden down with boxes.

"How d'you do, dear child," said Mrs. Strong, dropping her burden on the bed and kissing me kindly. " 'Happy is the bride the sun shines on,' and the sunshine's coming, never fear. I said to doctor as we came along that the day would be fine, after all, though it did look dubious this morning. Mr. Beecham will be here directly; he waited to meet Mr. Rappelle. Mrs. Beecham and the girls can't come; so sorry; she's got a cold and they engagements. Mr. Beecham will give you away, Theo. No, the doctor'd rather not. Some nonsense about leading a lamb to the slaughter; he's got old-fashioned ideas, you know. Yes, of course you must wear a veil; I wish 'twas lace, but tulle must do—and these gloves, Theo," opening another parcel, "I got several pairs; I didn't know

your number or Lilian's. As for flowers, I suppose Mr. Rappelle will bring plenty, but gentlemen are forgetful about trifles, so in case he shouldn't, you can wear these."

I felt grateful and tried to say so; but speaking, without tears, was difficult, and I resigned myself into her hands, hoping she might understand. A second, and third carriage rolled up the avenue, the last at a great pace.

"Mr. Rappelle and two strange men," said Lilian.

"Oh, my Theo, my Theo," cried Janey, a silent spectator hitherto, "how lovely you look, and how sad! Your eyes are too big, Theo; you've got great black circles under them, most down to your chin."

She ran to throw her arms around me, but Mrs. Strong deftly stopped her, stepping in between us.

"Tie this in your doggie's collar, dear," she said, giving the child a long piece of white satin ribbon. "He must have a bridal favor, too."

"He won't want it," Janey protested. "Charles Stuart may be selfish and greedy at times, but he loves Theo better than anyone else in the world, and he won't want her to be married. He wouldn't wear it if he knew what it meant—no, not for a hundred thousand greasy bones."

There came a knock at the door, a very gentle knock. Mrs. Strong cried, "Come in." I, feeling very odd and faint, could not speak. A small man stood on the threshold, bowing low. He had many boxes in his hands, and entering timidly, gave them to Mrs. Strong; then, looking at me, said gently, with a deprecatory smile:

"Mr. Rappelle's compliments to Miss Braithe. Miss Braithe will find Mr. Rappelle at the foot of the staircase when Miss Braithe is ready."

To please kind Mrs. Strong, who was doing all that anyone could to help me, I tried to open the various

boxes; but my cold fingers trembled and, in pity, she relieved me of the task. With sudden ohs! and ahs! of satisfaction, she drew from one a bridal bouquet of the choicest orchids, with clusters of orange-blossoms and stephanotis, tied loosely with white satin ribbons with long streamers.

"Beautiful!" she exclaimed, "and the latest fashion."

There were more flowers in another box; but these were roses, velvety red roses. Mrs. Strong openly wondered at this choice. But the diamonds—Mr. Rappelle's wedding gift—drove the memory of the roses from her mind.

"Three diamond stars, Theo! What big ones! And, dear child, look at this bracelet! Such splendid diamonds! The stars will look lovely in your hair. Doctor's always quoting that thing of—Byron's, isn't it?—about you: 'She walks in beauty, like the night.' What he'll say when he sees you crowned with stars I don't know."

I sat silent, having no words of praise for Mr. Rappelle's gifts. I felt unlike myself; so strangely apathetic. My mind was no longer filled with imaginings of what my life was to be, no longer searching for ways of escape, no longer fashioning stronger, more passionate prayers for sudden death—since were I gone Mr. Rappelle would care for Janey; of this I felt sure. No, I awaited, dully, the moment that was to place me among those of my fellow-creatures whom I most despised: the men and women who had sold their souls for gain.

"It is time to go down now, dear Theo," said Mrs. Strong, very gently.

I rose, took the bouquet—its fresh satin streamers fluttering close against the worn silk of my wedding gown—waited a moment while poor Mrs. Strong fussed anxiously about me, trying to make me fitter

for the part I was to play, and, very slowly, went out upon the gallery that circled the hall.

A huge fire of logs, brought from the Gills', blazed below in the great chimney. Its flames lighted up the darkest corners, the old verse carved above the fireplace, and the figure of a man standing at the foot of the staircase. Then everything swung out of place before me, blurred together. But although I had not sufficient courage to look at the man who was about to become my husband, I was able to descend the stairs steadily, clinging closely to the rail.

Mr. Rappelle did not speak as I joined him, but taking my hand placed it upon his arm, and so led me across the hall to the drawing-room, where the few friends who had come to see me married were assembled.

The shutters of the six tall windows opening upon the pillared portico were flung wide; and through them I saw the river, tossing southward, dark, blue, and splendid, its waves excited by their tussle with the sharp March wind. As I crossed the room I counted childishly, to see if the clergyman were standing just in the middle; yes, three windows to the right, three to the left of him. It was through the one to his left that I stared while dully reciting the vows that bound me to Etienne Rappelle. I saw, without seeing, the dark river, the mountains of its eastern shores, the deeply blue sky and the torn masses of white clouds driven across it—saw without seeing, yet now I can recall at will that wild March landscape.

Then I felt the touch of a stranger's lips upon my cheek—and knew that I had become Theodora Rappelle.

It was a dreary little wedding. Mrs. Strong and Mrs. Gill had very red eyes after the ceremony; while Dr. Strong's rugged face was careworn. My little Janey, wide-eyed and frightened-looking, clung tightly

to Dr. Strong's kind hand, as though in him she found the strength she lacked. Lilian and Mr. Beecham, however, seemed in excellent spirits; and I heard the old lawyer paying my sister pompous compliments on her lovely color and the brightness of her eyes.

The wedding breakfast was an odd affair, since Mrs. Strong, Mrs. Gill, and Lilian had each had a hand in its arrangement. I had insisted that Mrs. Gill and her family should be properly invited, in spite of Lilian's indignant objections. The Gills had not only accepted gladly, but had thrown themselves with enthusiasm into the preparations for the wedding. Mr. Gill himself brought a wagon-load of wood, and then, taking off his coat, went from room to room making fires. With the help of his stepson, poor Abel Wylde, he had dressed the house, in clumsy fashion, with greens; while his wife had busied herself in making an endless variety of pies and cakes. These last loaded the table, rubbing elbows with the delicate confections sent by Mrs. Strong from Hilltown; and ruining Lilian's efforts at decoration.

As if in a dream I heard Mrs. Gill indulging in loud-voiced repartee with Mr. Rappelle's lawyer, interspersing her sallies of wit with accounts of my likes and dislikes and high moral worth; my preference for apple-pie over pumpkin, childish weakness for hot ginger-bread and dogs, kindness to the poor and sick of a neighboring brickyard, and my deeply religious turn of mind.

"He's a lucky man, he is," she wound up, winking behind her spectacles in the direction of the bridegroom. "He's got a treasure in Miss Theo!" Then, becoming suddenly grave, she added solemnly, "An' I do hope the next time I see her a bride 'twill be done more proper—in a sating dress and bridesmaids three in a breast walking before her to the hymeneall alter."

Poor Mrs. Gill was unaccustomed to champagne,

and, drinking it as cider, was undone. Her tongue grew more ungovernable each moment, her voice more strident. Even during Mr. Beecham's little speech of congratulation she could not be silent, but, in imitation of what she had read in newspaper accounts of speeches, cried out at brief intervals, "Applause!" "Laughter!" and wept and laughed by turns.

After Mr. Rappelle had responded to Mr. Beecham, he asked me to come with him to the library for a few last words, and with an air of deep devotion led me from the room. His manner startled me from the state of apathy into which I had fallen, for I knew it to be assumed. Instantly my mind awoke to question what this meant. I was frightened. What was coming?

In spite of the fire glowing on the hearth—two leopards sat erect as andirons, holding the logs in check—the large room was very cold; and as Mr. Rappelle placed me in Old Vivian's special armchair, first pushing it close beside the blaze, I shivered involuntarily. He went back into the hall, and returning with an overcoat motioned me to rise and put it on. I shrank back as was but natural, I think, before this familiarity expected of me; but when Mr. Rappelle, as if misunderstanding my hesitation, said calmly, "The coat is mine," I forced myself to yield.

He treated me as though I were an uninteresting child for whom he was obliged to care; and wrapping the greatcoat well about me made me reseat myself beside the fire, and placed my feet upon a footstool. The air of tenderness had vanished; he was evidently about to get a disagreeable duty over as quickly as possible. For the first time I looked well at the man in whose hands lay my future weal or woe.

He had not seated himself, but leaned against the corner of the great chimney, opposite me, and stared down—somewhat gloomily—into the red heart of the

fire. He was of medium height, well set up, broad-shouldered; his hair and eyes dark brown, the latter long and very brilliant; the nose aquiline, lips thin; a firm chin with a slight cleft in it. His face was smooth-shaven, the skin a clear olive—a very French face. Such was Etienne Rappelle. As I looked up at him he suddenly transferred his gaze from the fire to me, and in his keen eyes I read—contemptuous pity!

I had fancied I had already felt the deepest misery possible, but I had not; since contempt from a Rappelle was something a Braithe could not be expected even to imagine. In that short moment, while I endured his scorn, I lived through a year of pain; for by it I learned my own shortcomings, and saw myself as I really was. Until then I had not known that I was either vain or proud. His look taught me that I had been—had been, since his contempt gave both their death blow—vain of my beauty and proud of my birth. I had fancied that because of these poor possessions Etienne Rappelle would at least have a certain respect for me. That they were as nothing in his eyes raised him still higher in my estimation, and made me more miserable than I had been before, since I and my sisters must be only a burden on his hands.

Without in the least realizing it I had, unconsciously, taken it for granted that I should receive from him the ready friendliness generally accorded me by all whom I met. I had hoped I might not please him too much—it had never occurred to me he would not like me at all. This discovery destroyed completely what little wit remained to me; I lost my customary self-poise, and was no longer capable of behaving toward this stranger as toward others.

I glanced up involuntarily at the portrait of my great-great-great-grandfather. How might he have taken this defection on the part of a Rappelle? His

blue eyes looked coldly down into mine, a smile that was a sneer was always upon the painted lips. His descendant was but receiving her just due, I said to myself, as I sat erect in his great armchair—the Leopards holding between them the shield with its motto, *Gare Griffes*, surmounting the high carved back—growing now hot, and now cold, as waves of shame for myself, and remorse toward Mr. Rappelle, swept across me.

"I thought your famous opal was overrated," said Mr. Rappelle—the silence that had seemed unending to me having in reality lasted only a moment—"but it is, indeed, remarkably beautiful. Every color of the rainbow seems fairly to flash across its surface—blue, green; ah, now it is crimson! A magnificent gem. You are too warm? Let me help you off with that coat—no, I beg you will keep it around your shoulders, so"—arranging it as a cloak. "This room is as damp as a vault, and your bright color has quite gone. The opal, too, looks white—curious! Can it be true, I wonder, that opals are in sympathy with——"

He glanced from the gem to my face and back again, studying both with as cold an interest as if they were, both, but bits of stone. I sat quite still, enduring, as best I might, his earnest scrutiny.

"Do you believe in superstitions, Theodora?"

"No."

"By the way, are you called Theodora in the family?"

"No, Mr. Rappelle."

"My name is Etienne," he said brusquely. "I beg you will use it. What are you called, please?"

"Theo."

"Very well. I have asked you to grant me this interview, Theo, in order to tell you what arrangements I have made for you and your sisters during my absence. I shall be away but a few weeks. I regret the necessity of going at all. You will, I trust, be ready

to leave Braithe by the end of this week, when you will go to my house in town to await my return. You will be very busy, of course, getting your trousseau," a grim smile flickered about his thin lips, "since I gave you no time in which to make the ordinary preparations for your wedding." He was silent a moment as, from his position on the opposite side of the fire, leaning lightly against the chimney-piece, he surveyed the big, shabby room. Then he said, "Braithe House needs a thorough going over. I made some plans on my way here this morning, and Merle can see to their being carried out. I won't have gas or electricity put in; lamps and candles suit the house better."

I was amazed at my odd feeling of relief that the secrets of the old house were not to be pried into by gas-fitters or electricians. Then I said, "Yes," humbly, thinking I was expected to say something. I felt frightened and breathless; to obey unquestioningly was new to me. But I saw that Mr. Rappelle hardly noticed that I had spoken—and wondered, until his next words gave me the explanation needed.

"Hervey Merle is my valet, confidential man, factotum, what you will; you must tell him what you want and he'll take care of you. I shall, in fact, leave you in his charge."

"Yes," I again murmured.

"Shortly before his death your father spoke to me of you," Mr. Rappelle went on, his voice growing hard and constrained, "and of your sister, Lilian. He told me that you had led the lives of nuns, never seeing anybody, going nowhere; that, in short, you had been denied all gayety, and were, consequently, unaccustomed to society—and its ways."

He evidently expected no answer, so I made none. Indeed he seemed to think me a mindless creature, with no ideas of my own and no will power. What he said was as much to himself as to me, his conscience

evidently obliging him to go through with what he considered his duty toward me.

"It is, of course, unfortunate," he continued, speaking more and more stiffly, "that you have never seen any," he hesitated, "any—men. Our relations toward each other are very peculiar, and may become, for you, very trying; since I am conservative. I have old-fashioned ideas."

He stopped short, and going to the window looked out upon the river. He was having a hard time and, though pitying, I could not help him. For how could I tell him that my father had told a falsehood, in giving the impression that I had never seen any men? That Mr. Rappelle thought there might be danger of my losing my heart, and not to him, was evident; as evident as that he thought me guileless through lack of experience—me, Theodora Braithe! His old-fashioned ideas meant that I was to be very circumspect in my behavior toward his friends, and I vowed to myself that I would be, as he returned to the fire and began to speak again.

"I have given Mr. Beecham to understand," he said slowly, "that I fell in love with you at your father's funeral. Those who see you will think this quite natural—as, also, that I was proud to ally myself with a Braithe. To the world we are to appear as man and wife; but it is my earnest desire that you should have some years in which to enjoy yourself before—before settling down. I shall have plenty of people here this summer—with your approval, of course—and you will, I hope, have a little pleasure after your many years of seclusion."

Here, I felt, was my opportunity to disabuse his mind of false ideas in regard to my lack of experience. To tell him that I was older than my years in sordid worldly wisdom, and that I had been called a flirt. I tried to speak, but failed. I could find neither voice

nor words. There came the sound of laughter from the hall; the wedding guests were leaving the dining-room. I thought that Mr. Rappelle had nothing more to say, and rose from my chair, taking his coat off as I did so.

"You have been very kind," I faltered, "and I thank you. If you will make my excuses to—to my friends, I will not see them again to-day. I—I am rather—tired."

He looked at me oddly.

"You must have your portrait painted in that chair," he said, replacing the coat upon my shoulders and buttoning me tightly into it, as though in silent rebuke of my carelessness in regard to catching cold. "The wine-colored velvet of its covering suits you. It must be renewed in the same shade. And that reminds me"—he put his hand in his breast pocket, brought out a small jewel box, and from it took a ring. "This is your engagement ring—allow me."

He lifted my left hand, a hand frost-bitten and roughened by housework, quite unfit for the wearing of jewels, and slipped a splendid ruby, set in diamonds, upon my finger. It covered the plain gold ring already placed there, hiding it out of sight. He held my hand a moment longer than was necessary. Was he looking at it—or only at the ruby? Was he mortified by the signs of labor on the hand of his wife?

"Theo," he said as he released me—his voice had grown very gentle—"I hope you will like my choice. I think rubies suit you, but if you would prefer something else——"

"No, no," I said, hastily, "nothing could be more beautiful."

"I am glad if it really pleases you," he said. "A girl should like her betrothal ring. Yours is given you under very strange circumstances. As I told you a moment ago, I am old-fashioned. It is my belief

that men and women should marry for love only. I do not believe in divorce. No one, if I can prevent it, shall know the conditions of our marriage. I must beg you to help me in this by writing to me often during my absence; and when I return, by treating me—in public—as if you liked me a little. Now I will take you upstairs."

He went to the bookcase, pressed the secret spring—as if he had done so a hundred times before—and motioned me to pass before him into the little room beyond.

I looked at him in astonishment, wondering that he knew this secret of the House. He read and answered the question in my eyes.

"You forget that my grandparents were your servants"—his voice was coldly scornful—"it was necessary that they should know the way into the private rooms of their masters." He turned from me and glanced about the narrow room. "This will be my bedroom," he said briefly, and signed to me to go upstairs. At the top of the spiral stairway he said, as if to himself, "Ah, yes! the dressing-room," and, pressing the spring in the wainscot, stood aside while I entered Lydia's apartment.

It was dark and gloomy, the shutters being closed. Mr. Rappelle opened those of the east window and examined the room with his keen, decisive glance—he seemed to see every detail in one swift scrutiny—then he looked at me, as I stood waiting his pleasure, and said, as if to himself, "In roses, velvety red roses, on white silk. The furniture pleases you, Theo? This is to be your room, of course, so if you prefer to have it modernized pray say so."

But I did not wish it changed; it had been my mother's room and Lydia's. I liked its old mahogany. I turned toward the door leading into the hall, but Mr. Rappelle, saying, "You will wish to go to your room,"

opened that communicating with my bedroom, and standing aside for me to enter, asked permission to follow.

The room was in great confusion, a distress the more to me since my companion looked about him with unembarrassed interest.

"This will be your boudoir," he said decidedly, rolling an easy-chair before the fire and signing to me to sit down. "Pink roses here"—he glanced at me—"soft pink roses on a creamy background. Yes, that will do very well. Ah!" stepping to the dressing-table, where the flowers still lay in their open boxes—nobody had had time to put them in water—and the cases containing the diamonds were piled in a careless heap. "I fear I made but a poor choice, but I had little time in which to choose. The ring, the ruby ring, concerned me most."

I murmured a few stupid words in thanks. Mr. Rappelle, paying no apparent heed, brought me a handful of red roses.

"Please give me one," he said, and laid them on my lap. "No, on second thoughts, three."

I looked up at him, intending to ask him to choose for himself; then moved by a sudden impulse, I selected the three. A bud, a half-blown rose, and the perfect flower. As I gave them to him Mr. Rappelle smiled—such a kind, well-pleased smile. My cheeks flushed painfully.

"Thank you," he said slowly. "I believe in omens. Ah! I was forgetting that you do not."

His expression changed back into its former coldness, the kind look in his brilliant eyes died away. He put the flowers carefully, however, into a pocket of the coat I had at last been allowed to take off, and I knew quite well that they would not be crushed. Etienne Rappelle evidently looked after his own well.

Going again to the dressing-table he placed upon it a handsome purse and an envelope.

"You will need what is here," he said, for the first time showing embarrassment, "and, probably, much more. Merle will keep you supplied. And I must beg," raising his hand to silence the protest on my lips, "that you will get for yourself and your sisters everything that you need. Remember, Theo"—a grim smile played about his thin lips—"that I lose or gain credit according as you appear—so pray shine. You will find there a letter of introduction to ——," he named a celebrated surgeon. "He is a personal friend of mine. I hope he may be able to do something for the poor little child."

I tried to speak, but could not for the tears, for the emotion that choked me.

"Good-by, Theo," he stood close beside me, and he spoke very gently. "Don't rise, I beg. I will write to you from town to-night. Tell Merle just what you want. Good-by!"

The door closed; he was gone.

IX

I sat quite still, staring through my tears at the roses on my lap; but for them I should have thought the events of the morning a dream, and a wild one. The rich fragrance of these red, red roses filled the room, bringing thoughts of summer sunshine and drowsy warmth, of birds, butterflies, and bees; of our old-fashioned garden, with its sun-dial saying ever:

"I count life by sunny hours and them alone." Would the coming summer bring sunny hours to little Jane and me?

A sudden rattle of hail against the window, hail driven so fiercely by the angry wind gusts that it sounded like shot, and threatened to break the panes, roused me to a sense of what was going on in Braithe. The room had grown quite gloomy, the steely hail-cloud darkening the sky. As I dried my eyes and looked about me the front door shut heavily, and a carriage rolled down the avenue.

A moment later Lilian whirled into the room. She was in high spirits, but scolded a little over her errand as she ran hither and thither.

"The Lord High Cheesemonger's gone at last, Theo," she said, "but he left orders in plenty behind him—where are Mrs. Strong's gloves? Oh, never mind, I've found them. Yes, I'm sent to get her things because you, milady, are not to be disturbed. The way that man slings on style beats all! 'Mrs. Rappelle,' quoth he," she tried to make her voice pompous and commanding, " 'begs me to excuse her to her friends'

—friends, indeed, Gills, Strongs, and strangers!—'Mrs. Rappelle'—he's bursting with pride over the match he's made, and no wonder—'Mrs. Rappelle is tired and I think she had better rest.' Then he sends me to fetch and carry for Mrs. Strong! He's got sand enough, but old bachelors always have. Not that he's old in his own estimation—I suppose he feels he's o'er young to marry yet, seeing all the other Rappelles waited to do it till they were octogenarians. Theo!" she paused beside me frowning, suspicious, "What are you doing, what have you been doing with those roses? Have you begun flirting with that—that grocer already?"

"No, Lilian," I said very sadly, "and I wonder that you can have the heart to ask me such a question."

"Then what are you doing with them?" she persisted. I blushed hotly. I was glad she did not know where three had gone. "There," she exclaimed, "your cheeks are scarlet! You have been posing with them, amusing yourself turning that fool's head. Well, he's gone for a few weeks at least, but I'm disgusted with you," and she swept from the room.

I rose hastily, anxious to be rid of the flowers, remembering, with a pang of shame, the odd selection I had made when choosing the three. What had possessed me? Must I ever, because of the Braithe taint in my veins, strive to please, even unconsciously? For I had had no conscious desire to say anything to Mr. Rappelle through the roses. My conscience acquitted me, yet I hurried the flowers into water and placed them on a far away table, my cheeks as red as they.

How good Mr. Rappelle had proved himself, how generous! My heart ached, fairly, with gratitude. He gave everything, asked nothing. I must strive to forget the scorn in his eyes, to remember always that it was deserved. How might an honorable man feel

otherwise toward a woman who had willingly sold herself for money? I must learn to live without his respect and, harder still, without my own.

Thus thinking I chanced to glance at the pictures nearest me: those of my father and Herbert Fayne. A sudden longing to see once more my old playfellow took possession of me, and, taking his photograph from its place, I carried it to the window and looked long at the handsome face of my boy cousin. I wished he had been with me that morning, had given me away; his right, surely, as my nearest relative. As I gazed musingly at the picture I forgot, for the moment, all his faults of character that had, as a child, grated upon me, remembering, instead, only the sunny temperament, the readiness to please—and to be pleased—the easy-going unconsciousness of the failings of others. I did not say to myself, as always hitherto, that he was incapable of recognizing moral lapses in his companions, because he himself was without sense of moral obligation. No, I simply longed for his easy presence. He had never judged me; had he been with me he would have told me all had been well done, that all must come right in the end. For if Herbert had sometimes teased, he had always petted me when I thought I had done wrong. Why I fancied that though never able to quiet my child's conscience, he might now set my grown-up one at ease, I do not understand. My mind indulged in strange vagaries on that changeful March day.

A plaintive whine outside my door caused me to hang up my cousin's picture hastily and run to let in the Chevalier. He entered slowly, not looking at me, stepping warily, legs stiffened as if treading upon very breakable eggs, and going to the corner of the room where he was obliged to do penance for his sins—called by Jane the Corner of Punishment—sat himself down gingerly, squeezed himself as tight against

the wall as possible, and then allowed himself one furtive glance at me.

I knew at once that he, too, had been forbidden to disturb "Mrs. Rappelle." Lilian, glad in her turn to give orders, had probably told Jane sharply to keep "that tiresome beast away from poor Theo."

"Good Chevalier!" I said tenderly, sitting down again in the chair by the fire. "Good Charles Stuart to come to his Theo; he knew she wanted him."

Ah, my collie, my Chevalier—my true-hearted friend! In an instant he had bounded from his corner and, whimpering with pleasure, had laid his paws upon the arm of my chair and his beautiful head against my breast. Poor fellow! He was almost plethoric with overgorging at my wedding feast (a feast he would have died rather than have touched had he known what it meant to me) and no sooner was he sure that I approved his coming, than he settled himself upon the hearth-rug with a grunt of satisfaction, and snored profoundly.

There came another sound outside my door, the gentle tinkle of glasses, then a timid knock. It was Hervey Merle who entered, in answer to my "Come in"; Hervey Merle bearing a tray covered with a dainty array of dishes and a bottle of wine. He wheeled a table to my side, set the tray upon it, then, rescuing the roses from their distant corner, placed them near the tray. The Chevalier, roused from his nap, blinked lazily at the stranger and the viands, already too accustomed to both, by one short day's experience, to heed either.

"I told the young ladies, Mrs. Rappelle, that you would take some refreshment while alone. Better a dish of herbs, and peace and wine therewith, than a stale ox served half raw. Try this chicken-and-lettuce sandwich, dear lady; I made it myself; you ate no luncheon."

So saying Hervey Merle spread a napkin deftly across my lap, filled a glass with port—something told me it had been brought from town by Mr. Rappelle for Janey—and handed it to me with a low bow.

It was new to me to be cared for and waited upon; new, and very pleasant. I looked with some curiosity at Hervey Merle. He was small, but appeared strong—a wiry little man, with sandy hair parted so much to one side that it rose high on top of his head, like the ridiculous fat curl worn there by little boys in faded daguerreotypes. His small deep set gray eyes looked keenly out from beneath bushy eyebrows, his features were insignificant, his cheeks as fresh-colored as a winter apple.

As I glanced at him he smiled his deprecatory smile, his head a little to one side, as if hoping he had pleased me, but doubtful.

"You have made me so comfortable, Hervey," I said. "I am to call you Hervey?" He bowed. "You must let me thank you." His color rose high. "Mr. Rappelle tells me you are to remain with me; I am very glad, for I am sure I shall like you." He laid his hand on his heart, bowing again and again.

"If I may be allowed to heat bricks," he murmured, "and put them in the beds? You can't make a silk purse out of worn-out cloth—still hot bricks——"

"Pray do; Miss Janey loves to be warm—and you, Hervey," suddenly remembering the servantless condition of the house. Where was he to sleep? I put down the wine I was comfortably sipping, and rose to my feet, disgusted by my selfishness, "I will see about a room for you at once, Hervey," I said. "I should have thought of it before."

"You—to think of me!" exclaimed the little man, in an apparent rapture of gratitude. "Of me! When a blanket before the parlor fire! Of me—and her wedding day!"

I was back in my chair, the glass of wine again in my hand, before I well knew what had happened.

"The sun sets," said my strange servitor. "I will bring a lamp. For you, sir," to the Chevalier, "there is a bone downstairs." And he went away; but Charles Stuart, for the first time in his life, was too full for bones.

"Isn't Hervey queer?" said Janey, later, "but I like him. What do you suppose he said when he got supper for us? 'Funeral baked meats, even when cold, are tastier sometimes than a wedding feast."

"I wish it hadn't hailed," said Lilian, fretfully; "dubious morning, and short hail shower! Well, the afternoon has been bright, and it's a glorious night; it might have been worse, I suppose. That idiot, Abel Wylde, spilled coffee on my gown! Not that it matters now," superbly; "I shall give the old dud to the poor."

"I wish poor Jim might have been with us this morning," I said, musingly, "and Herbert Fayne."

"Theo!" exclaimed Lilian, in disgust, "what horrid people you care for. That common Jim Wylde! Why, I hated him even when I was a child, and they say he's as bad as he can be."

"I wish he'd come home," I sighed. I did not care to tell Lilian how often the name of my old playmate rose to my lips in prayer. If only he would turn over a new leaf! He had been good and generous-hearted as a boy.

"Herbert, too," continued Lilian. "Of all disagreeable people! What did you want him for, pray?"

"He ought to have given me away, Lilian."

"Why?"

"Because he's our nearest male relative," I said.

"Yes, he's a Braithe all through," said Lilian, spitefully, "as far as Braithe vices go. Theo! do you know

I believe he's no Fayne at all, but just a Braithe; he's the image of Old Vivian."

"What do you mean?" I asked, astonished by her strange words, but Lilian paid no heed.

"His mother was father's sister, and just like him, so, of course, no morals at all, and Uncle Fayne was as ugly as sin, and lost his money before they'd been married a year. Dear me, what an idiot I've been not to understand before, when I've heard often enough how that handsome second cousin of father's, Herbert Braithe, shot himself after she died. Herbert Braithe Fayne! Very appropriate, to be sure."

I cried out aghast at these strange, these evil imaginings on my sister's part, but she waved my remonstrances aside, telling me to think as I pleased, and let her alone. Then she asked what Mr. Rappelle had said to me in the library. When she heard she was very much pleased.

"So he thinks you a kind of simpleton, does he?" she commented. "Then you act up to it, Theo; that will keep him at arm's length better than anything else. And father said we were like nuns!" she laughed sweetly. "Bless his lying old tongue—so he filled the grocer's eyes with dust! Well, you must keep them full, Theo, and do your flirting on the sly (for flirt you will when the chance comes, it's in the blood), for if you do it in the open he'll divorce you, sure as shooting. Now don't blaze out with your religious nonsense about not believing in divorce! What'll you have to say about it, pray? And if you mash him there'll be the same result, for then he'll be forever hanging 'round, and, sooner or later, catch you amusing yourself. There'll be rows from morning till night then, and the divorce court to end up with. Now that we've got the Rappelle money, do, for Heaven's sake, behave yourself so that we can keep it in the family—where it has always belonged."

X

For a time after my marriage I felt as though living in a dream. We went to town to Mr. Rappelle's fine house, and began to spend a very great deal of money. Lilian took to luxury and extravagance naturally, but they frightened me. Accustomed all my life to the practise of the most rigid economy, I felt it wicked to throw away in a week what would, in old times, have made us comfortable for a year. The price of our new gowns worried me, and Lilian bought many. To her delight Mr. Rappelle had asked me to make my mourning as light as possible, and she, saying she must do the same, wore black lace frocks and silks of pale lilac, most becoming to her fair beauty. She had a maid, and kept her busy. This Hervey had suggested.

"Lilian's changed her spots," remarked Janey one morning, when Lilian was starting on one of her endless shopping excursions. "But she always said she would be neat if she were rich and saw people."

Hervey had come in to ask my orders for the day. "New brooms sweep well for a time, of course," he said absently, then added, "but, as you were thinking, Mrs. Rappelle, it is high time I engaged a maid for Miss Lilian. I'll do so at once."

Hervey was manager during Mr. Rappelle's absence, and always assumed that what he wished done I had already ordered. I did not approve of the expense of a maid, but my objections were apparently unheard by him, for one appeared, to wait upon Lilian, the next day.

Mr. Rappelle was away but a few short weeks; when

he returned I saw little of him, rarely meeting him save at meals, and never being alone with him but when driving in the park. Lilian insisted that I should endeavor to appear as the quiet, nun-like country girl my father had described me, and although I could not agree with her as to the fatal effect of my conversational charms, I felt so shy and ill at ease with Mr. Rappelle that the rôle required no acting. Tongue-tied, sad-hearted, I sat at the head of his table when we had no guests; and, when not alone, Lilian kept so sharp a watch upon me—fearing lest my spirits might rise and I betray my real nature—that embarrassment held me dumb.

My only relaxation was when in the studio of Monsieur Randoce, an amateur portrait painter whose talent Mr. Rappelle admired greatly. This handsome Frenchman had asked permission to paint my portrait, and Mr. Rappelle, delighted, had consented without even consulting me.

Accompanied by Lilian's maid or Hervey, I went almost daily to sit for Monsieur Randoce, and, seeing that he was a seasoned society man, accustomed to gay society chatter, I let myself go, and laughed and talked to my heart's content. This was a great relief; though I paid for my amusement when he came to dine, and I had to resume my silent rôle.

After these occasions Lilian spoke to me, more than once, upon the necessity of keeping to my part. Her words were vulgar, but her voice, always high-bred and melodious, made them sound a trifle less brutal than they really were. Janey was present during one of these lectures, to my deep regret.

"I wish Etienne would go back to Europe and stay there," Lilian began, "for you're beginning to weaken. Anyone can see that you're dying to mash him, and there will be the dickens to pay if you do."

"Lilian!" I exclaimed, indignant.

"You needn't lose your temper and play innocent to me," she went on. "You've always flirted like fury whenever you got a chance, just as you're now doing with Randoce. Mash the grocer's son and see what'll happen; you can't expect him to have fine feelings, like us Braithes. He probably thinks you're nothing but his squaw, and—well, just you watch out."

"I hate you, Lilian!" cried Janey, stamping her small foot. "Poor Theo, turning all colors of the rainbow! You imagine fine feathers are everything—daw, with peacock's plumes. But you're common, yes, common and—and low!"

"Hush, little Jane," I said, distressed by the turn the conversation had taken, "and, Lilian, you need not be alarmed; Mr. Rappelle dislikes me very much."

I could not but regret this, although I knew it was for the best. To Lilian Mr. Rappelle was always the attentive host; to my Janey the most tender and devoted of brothers. When in public, he treated me with the eager courtesy of a bridegroom, but at other times with only the cold politeness due to my sex. And I, I was afraid of him. I dreaded being alone with him, since then the old scornful pity shone in his long, dark eyes, and galled me.

"I wish you'd mind and not open your head when he's around," Lilian continued. "You were on the verge of doing it last night when Randoce was here. I'll do the talking. Don't you even look at Rappelle. Do the Simple Susan act, and, for Heaven's sake, don't indulge in laughing. If only that hateful old Hervey don't give you dead away and bust the whole business! You're always gabbling and giggling with him, turning the old idiot's head. I understand liking to flirt, Theo—given a suitable flirtee, like Randoce, for instance, and there's nothing like it, of course—but the way you trouble to lay out everybody, beats me.

Yes, everybody and everything! Men, women, children, dogs, horses, cats—all's fish comes to your net, and into it they must go!"

Janey had, to my relief, left the room.

Ah me! All the Rappelle wealth might not free my little sister from the chains of pain that bound her. The best doctors had been consulted in vain; they could help, but to cure was impossible. My sole comfort lay in the knowledge that she had every luxury; a good maid, trained to nursing, to wait upon her, and a carriage to take her daily into the open air.

Mr. Rappelle was very generous to us, grudging us nothing that money could buy; too generous, I thought, and one day, finding myself alone with him, I said so.

"You are not extravagant, but the reverse," he said, looking at me coldly. "When money was in my part of the marriage contract, why do you hesitate to spend?"

"I have spent a great deal," I said.

"You don't show for it, then."

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled.

"You wear that thing," pointing at my dinner gown of black satin, "one night, and a ruffly black one the next. If you have such a superabundance of toilets why don't you wear them?"

I was silent, not wishing to say where the money had gone.

"Clothes are not everything," I faltered.

"They happen to be in this instance. Don't you care for dress, Theo?"

"Yes, I am fond of pretty things." I wished very much that I had held my tongue on the money question.

"I know what has gone for charity"—I looked at him in astonishment; how was this possible?—"but

what I wish to know is—will you kindly inform me how many frocks you possess?"

"Oh," I said, evasively, "a good many."

"Evening dresses," he persisted, "how many, besides these two familiar friends?"

I remained silent.

"Oblige me by answering."

"I have these two," I said desperately. If this sort of thing kept on I felt I might end by detesting Mr. Rappelle.

"There is no reason why Mrs. Rappelle's sister should not adorn herself," said this strange man, "but Mrs. Rappelle need not play the part of eiderdown duck, in order to provide her with the raiment her soul loves. Let Lilian revel in finery if she pleases, but henceforth I must beg my wife to see that Lilian does not outshine her."

So he knew that the heavy dressmakers' bills were really Lilian's! Well, it was kind of him not to object. I said so.

"You are very generous, Etienne"; and my long tongue running away with me, I added, "you give everything and receive—" I hesitated, faltered, became silent.

"Nothing, you were about to say, Theo?" he smiled grimly. "I think you forget the honor of the connection. To the husband of the beautiful Miss Braithe of Braithe Manor the world has nothing left to offer."

I turned and left the room without a word, driven by the stones of his scorn. It was natural, I said to myself, as I tried to check my tears, quite natural that an honorable man should despise a woman who had consented to marry a stranger for money, but was it kind to let her see the contempt in which he held her, so plainly? Then I reminded myself how tiresome I had been when with him; never trying to show

my gratitude by striving to be agreeable. No wonder he was irritable, he was convinced that he had married a fool. I could not thoroughly enjoy the success of my own acting; I disliked very much being thought foolish.

XI

We returned to Braithe late in May. Lilian tried to persuade Mr. Rappelle to postpone our home-coming until June, but in vain. She prophesied much evil from this foolish choice of what she believed to be an unlucky month. Her discomfort vanished, however, when, on our arrival in Hilltown one lovely May afternoon, she found a barouche drawn by four horses, in waiting to carry us home. The deep rose-pink stained her cheeks and, in her excitement, forgetting her usually pretty company manners, she pushed past me in order to enter the carriage at once. Mr. Rappelle laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Theo first, Lilian," he said quietly, and helped me in.

"O Etienne, forgive me!" she cried, paling nevertheless with displeasure. She was very angry.

Janey, in high feather, occupied the box with Mr. Rappelle, who drove. The grooms clambered on their seat behind us as we dashed up the hill.

"Such bad form!" ejaculated Lilian. "No real gentleman would think of driving himself in a barouche. I should think the men would fall off that nasty little seat behind the hood. A gentleman considers the comfort of his dependents, but what can one expect of a parvenu?"

"I wish you would remember that you are speaking to his wife," I said, ruffled by her words. "Etienne had this carriage so that Janey might lie down on the back seat, if tired by the journey, and four horses to get her home quickly."

"Sweet sensibility O La!" she quoted, "I heard a little lamb cry baa——"

We had turned into the main street and I cut Lilian short by calling to Etienne to stop. I had caught sight of Mrs. Strong, walking comfortably homeward. Her kind face flushed with pleasure as, the carriage drawing up, I sprang out and caught her hands in mine. It seemed years since I had seen her, and I laughed as I kissed her cheek, having much difficulty in restraining my tears; each day they came more easily. Mr. Rappelle, lifting Janey from her high seat, joined us, greeting Mrs. Strong with cordial respect, and Lilian, seeing friendliness was the fashion, followed suit.

"How well you all look!" exclaimed the kindly simple soul, beaming upon us. "And, dear me, how fashionable! Now I get a better look at you, Theo, I think you've grown thin. Too much town amusement, is that it, spinning street-yarn all day? Yes, you certainly are very thin. Well, country air will soon brace you up. Make her drink milk, Mr. Rappelle."

"May I come and see you soon?" I asked. Etienne was scrutinizing me closely. I wished that she had not commented upon my appearance.

"The sooner the better, my dear," was the hearty answer. "Come early, before ten o'clock. Doctor will want to see you. Dear me, I believe he thinks the sun rises and sets with Theo Braithe! And he's been in the dark some time now; ever since you went away." And laughing delightedly over her own wit she walked briskly away.

"Vulgar old thing!" grumbled Lilian, as we rolled rapidly northward. "I did hope we were done with common people! Shall I ever forget your wedding and the ceaseless twaddle of her and Mrs. Gill? But you like vulgarians, Theo."

As we drew near Braithe my heart began to beat to suffocation. I had not realized how many, and varying emotions, my return to the old house would awaken. A cry of delight from Janey told me when we turned into the avenue, for again the troublesome tears were blurring my vision. The stone pillars, just beyond the little bridge, were wreathed with flowers in our honor. We dashed on, up the hill and between the long lines of locust trees; the Leopards grinned at us through garlands of wisteria and lilac blossoms. We were at home.

At the foot of the long flight of stone steps stood Hervey Merle. Ignoring everyone save me, he offered a huge bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley, bowing low.

"Welcome home, dear madam," he said gravely, "for home is where the head must seek its pillow; and be it ever so humble there's generally no place else to go. May I be permitted to show you to your room?"

"No," said Mr. Rappelle, suddenly appearing beside me, "I will attend to Mrs. Rappelle."

We entered the large central hall together. It was no longer gloomy, the skylight having been greatly enlarged. I expressed my approval warmly; at least I might be lavish in praise.

"Yes, it is an improvement," said Etienne. He spoke without enthusiasm. "You can see now to read that old motto over the chimney. Have you any idea what it means?"

"My little mother knew," said Janey, pushing in between us; and taking my hand in one of hers she slipped the other into Etienne's. "She said when Faith, meaning a woman, you know, and Honor, that means a man, plight trouthe—isn't it spelled funny? —become engaged, that is, everything here will be all right. Mummy thought it certainly would, some day, come to pass. I wish it would; soot means sweet, Etienne, did you know that?"

"Yes, Janey," said Etienne gravely, and the child leaving us I was led upstairs.

"I have had your old room turned into a boudoir," said Mr. Rappelle, opening the door for me to enter. "I hope you may like it."

The dingy room was transformed; it had become a dainty bower. I expressed my admiration.

"I notice that you rarely wear your diamonds," he continued, "perhaps these pearls may please you better," motioning toward a jewel box, beautifully inlaid, that lay upon the toilet-table.

I had been far from happy before, but the long rope of splendid pearls this box contained filled my cup to the brim. I had difficulty in thanking the giver properly.

"Now I think of it, Theo, your diamonds are set in gold; they ought to be in silver, seeing you are in mourning. I will have them reset. Stupid of me not to have had them done so in the first place! Is that the reason the opal never appears; is it too gay?"

"Yes," I said; then summoning up my courage, "Please don't give me any more, Etienne."

"Any more what?"

"Jewels; I have so many already." My collection was very large; Etienne added to it constantly.

"I am sorry if you don't like your pearls," he said coolly, "but I must ask you to let me see them often."

Before I had time to say how much I admired them —this truthfully, for they were beautiful—he flung wide the door leading into what had been Lydia's room. I hardly recognized the heavy mahogany furniture against its new background of rose-strewn hangings.

"I like roses, as you see," said Etienne, "and I trust my arrangement of your rooms may meet with your approval."

He ceased speaking and waited, expectant. I

made an effort to voice my appreciation cordially, but his expression told me I had failed.

"Do you like milk?" he asked suddenly.

"What, Etienne?" Was I going crazy—or he?

He repeated his question, and he looked cross.

"Why—yes," I faltered.

"Then in Heaven's name drink it. That woman said you needed it. Is it because I pay for the food that you are starving yourself? Really, Theo, you are enough to drive a man mad!"

I quite agreed with him, so held my tongue.

"There, I beg your pardon," he said fiercely. "I have been rude; I am sorry."

"Oh, not at all," I answered lamely, being, as Jane would have said, completely off my head.

The next moment he had left the room, unable, I fancied, to endure my idiocy longer.

I returned to my new boudoir, rebelling against fate. The sight of the pearls on the dressing-table made my heart sick. During the few hours given me for thought, before my marriage, I had failed to take into consideration the luxury I should myself have to accept. Janey needed all that wealth could give, I had told myself, and poor Lilian was utterly unfitted by nature for earning her bread. Of my share, my personal share of the Rappelle millions, I had, stupidly, failed to think. It had descended upon my shoulders heavily, a weight both day and night; driving peace from my soul and sleep from my pillow; making tears come more readily than laughter.

An intense desire to escape, if only for a few moments, took possession of me. Ah, thank Heaven, I might take refuge in the Cell of Flagellation; that, at least, must be bare of adornment, free of the Rappelle gold. I touched the secret spring, the panel slid aside—I did not enter.

The rough stones of the floor were hidden by an

oriental rug, soft-colored, velvety; on the opposite wall hung an ivory cross, richly carved; beneath it a prie-dieu, furnished with embroidered velvet cushions; on the hand-rest a prayer book, with cover of ivory and clasps of silver. As I stood staring at this destruction of my only refuge there came a tap at the door. It was Hervey Merle. He looked wistful and dejected.

Sorry for the disappointment he had had in not being permitted to show me the changes wrought, I invited him to enter.

"See, Hervey," I said, taking up his bouquet, that lay, forgotten, beside the pearls, "I have been too busy looking at all the pretty new things to put these in water."

"The oratory, Mrs. Rappelle," glancing into the cell—"it pleases?"

"It is your doing, Hervey?"

"Yes, Mrs. Rappelle."

"You have shown great taste," I said gently. The thing was done, why make the kind little man miserable?

"Nymph in thine orations, which in cold weather, Mrs. Rappelle, if long, a little oil-stove—it looks like silver, carved, matching the clasps of the book, and being silvery, subdued, more fitting to religious purposes than gold—Mrs. Rappelle?"

"Yes, Hervey."

He hesitated, looked miserable, then said:

"Speech is silver, of course, but silence, when you don't want to tell, is above rubies—and she was homesick for the mountains, 'My heart's in the Highlands,' and in her work, too, they tell me, excellent references—Mrs. Rappelle, give a dog a bad name and every boy throws the first stone—still you didn't want one, Mr. Rappelle, he insisted—damned considerable, begging your pardon, when he heard Miss Lilian had and you hadn't. Let sleeping dogs sleep on, but—she's Swiss,

Mrs. Rappelle, name Josette, she's coming now, I think——"

A sweet-faced maid stood in the doorway. I understood Hervey's rambling speech. I preferred waiting upon myself, still——

"Come in, Josette," I said, "you are just in time to help me dress for dinner." Then, aside to Hervey, pale and ill at ease, "I am not displeased, Hervey. What a nice, modest-looking girl! I know I shall like her."

"Dear lady—" poor Hervey commenced, but unable to get further, went hastily out of the room.

Anxious to avoid Etienne's displeasure I made a grand toilet, wearing, as its finishing touch, the new pearls. Hervey's lilies adorned hair and corsage.

"Pearls!" exclaimed Lilian, whom I found alone in the drawing-room. "What perfect ones, and what a lot of them. But the man's a fool! They'll bring awful luck. First comes home in May, then these pearls! Really, Theo, it's too much. Oh, here he comes. Dear Etienne," smiling gently at her brother-in-law, "how exquisite these pearls are! I was just telling Theo that you spoil her. They suit her though, to perfection. We mustn't tell her how handsome she looks in them, must we? Did you suggest those lilies in her hair?"

"I think a kind wish to please Merle suggested them." Etienne spoke slowly, looking at me so steadily that my eyes fell. "I am right, Theo?" he asked, as we went in to dinner.

"Hervey is always so nice to me," I said, accepting the apology that I believed lay in both words and manner. I bore him no grudge for his moment of anger upstairs—he had been sorely tried.

Hervey, who, since his master's marriage, had given up the duties of valet to assume those of house-steward and butler, was waiting in the dining-room. As

Etienne led me to a chair on one side of the table, Hervey drew out one at the other. I paused in doubt.

"The draught from the window, sir," said Hervey gently. "Mrs. Rappelle had better sit here."

"There is more there," said Etienne. "It will come directly on her shoulder, from the door."

"Which shall be shut," closing it. "Here, please, Mrs. Rappelle."

"You can't keep the pantry-door shut. Sit here, Theo."

"The screen, sir, prevents that being felt. This will be best, Mrs. Rappelle."

The scene had become ridiculous. The two men, each grasping firmly the back of his chosen chair, eyed each other angrily. Another moment and I should disgrace myself by wild laughter. Fortunately I suddenly realized that the table was round, and saw my way of escape.

"I will sit here," I said, moving to a chair directly in front of the chimney-piece over which hung the portrait of Old Vivian's unprincipled wife, "here, under my noble ancestress, the Lady Sophia Braithe." Then, the Braithe demon, as if summoned by her name, taking possession of me, I added, casting down my eyes and speaking very demurely, "Perhaps I may grow to be like her in time. If you will take the place opposite, Etienne, you may amuse your conservative fancy by imagining yourself the first Vivian, the builder of this Braithe."

Before he had time to reply Lilian had rushed into fluent speech, and during the hour of dinner she and Janey—who had been allowed to sit up, in honor of the home-coming—kept the ball of conversation rolling gayly. Later, when I went upstairs to kiss Jane goodnight, she had still more to say.

"O Theo, do you think Etienne will send Hervey away?"

"Why should he?"

"Well, you saw them at dinner. Dear me, how funny they looked! I was sorry—and a little frightened, but for all that, I thought I'd bust, I wanted to laugh so. You did, too, your eyes just sparkled! But in the library, before that, gracious, how they had it! 'You should know her tastes by this time,' says Etienne (I'd got as far as the door, but I didn't dare go in). 'I hope you've ordered a dinner that will suit her.' 'If ambrosia and nectar,' answers Hervey, 'were cried on the market-place, Mrs. Rappelle should have them if the martial cloak to my back went for their purchase.' 'Hum,' (you know what I mean, Theo, it begins with a D, but I mustn't say it), 'Hum your martial cloak,' says Etienne, and he looked so cross I ran away."

When I returned to the drawing-room Lilian attacked me.

"I was sorry for you because you had to sleep in Lydia's ghastly room—I might better say in the morgue, for everybody has died there—but now I'm glad, yes, glad! Going on as you've been doing! Setting those two fools at loggerheads and then—really you've no conscience, Theo—then letting all your dimples come and flushing up. Oh, I've no patience with you!"

That night, turning back a corner of the rich rug, and kneeling on the hard cold stones, I prayed long in my Cell of Flagellation for forgiveness for my proud heart, my too-ready tongue, and my many, many faults and weaknesses. I begged that I might learn how to gain the respect of the man to whom we owed so much, without losing my own dignity. There had been no scorn in his eyes that whole day—if only I might see in them honest, friendly approval.

A resentful whimper outside the panel roused me from my devotions. I rose, and admitted the Cheva-

lier. His pleasure in the changes of the cell was expressed by wagging tail and smiling eyes. Turning around and around in the middle of the soft rug he finally settled himself with a thump, and grunted his contentment.

"Charles Stuart, pampered lap-dog, you grow overfat!" I said severely.

He blinked one eye at me drowsily, then went to sleep.

XII

We were alone at Braithe but a few days only, Monsieur Randoce joining us almost immediately in order to continue his work upon my portrait, and our party being still further enlarged by the introduction of a family chaplain, in the person of a very young clergyman just ordained. If I liked this Mr. Brace, he was to remain with us until he got the offer of a good living elsewhere. And I promised myself to be pleased with him since he was very poor, and had a mother in the background who needed help. He had had charge of restoring the chapel during our absence.

Lilian laughed at Etienne's desire to return to the old customs, but I was very glad that the chapel was to be used again, and that we were to have a chaplain living in the house.

Mr. Brace came to us the day after our arrival; a fair-haired little fellow, painfully shy.

"You know that joke," said Janey, who took a deep interest in him, "about never opening your mouth but you put your foot in it? Mr. Brace is the man. When he doesn't talk I wish he would, and when he does I wish he wouldn't. He seems good, but—he worries me!"

Mr. Brace did not worry me, but Monsieur Randoce did, since he pretended—I could not believe he was in earnest—to be in love with me. One discomfort, however, his French training led him to spare me; that of keeping up his air of devotion before Etienne. Husbands, according to his ethics, were to be deceived. I

soon saw that he believed my silent rôle to have been assumed for the same reason as his polite indifference, and I ought to have been angry, but he was so comical that amusement destroyed my vexation.

During the last week in June an unexpected visitor arrived at Braithe.

I was in my boudoir late one afternoon embroidering, when Lilian came in, looking very unhappy. The weather was already that of July, hot midsummer weather, and a thunder-storm was brewing. Big sullen clouds sailed overhead, messengers from the dunderbergs that had peeped at us, over the western hills, all the morning.

"Embroidering? O Theo, how idiotic!" said Lilian fretfully, throwing herself down upon the lounge as she spoke. "Lightning may come any minute now."

She wore a white dressing-gown, covered with lace, and her pretty hair rippled over her shoulders. Her pretty face wore lines of discontent.

"Do put down your needle, Theo," she continued. "Why you want to sew, when you don't have to, beats me! If you go on in the way you've been doing lately, however, I suppose we'll all have to grovel in the dirt again. Perhaps that's the reason you don't care if you are struck dead—or blind."

"What do you mean?" I asked, putting away my work as she had desired.

"Oh, you know well enough! Etienne's caving. When I saw him lugging home that great bottle of tonic-stuff the day after we got here—really, Theo, it's positively sickening the row he makes about your lack of appetite; watching you at table, and running after you when you pretend to forget your dose."

"Nonsense, Lilian, that's not true," I said, coloring deeply with displeasure.

"Sends Hervey then; it amounts to the same thing—I wish you'd happen to see them once, cracking their

skulls together trying who can grab the bottle first. Well, I hope you'll be satisfied when you've got divorced, and we're living on a miserly alimony in a squalid country town; for that's what we're coming to, you mark my words! You've grown so accustomed to being free that you forget you're married, but he doesn't, although he has spoiled you so outrageously, and when you get him to the boiling point—he's more than tepid now—it'll be wife, or no wife, and a 'Madam, take your choice.' I know you, Theo, you're as stubborn as ten mules. You're a real Braithe—you won't give in. You won't think of me or Jane, for with you it's always self, self, self!"

"If you find me so disagreeable," I said, losing my temper because of this undeserved rebuke, and wounded by her heartlessness, "why do you come in here?"

"That's right, turn me from your door, and at the moment when misfortune's close upon me," she whimpered. "Look at that," drawing a beautiful turquoise—her natal stone, a present from Etienne—from her finger, "look at that, and dare tell me it isn't turning green!"

I took the ring to the window, for the heavy pall of cloud was fast obscuring the light, and examined it carefully. As Lilian had said, the stone had a faint greenish tint. I looked inside the setting, and saw what appeared to be a tiny particle of soap.

"Why, you've been washing your hands with it on!" I exclaimed.

"Well, anyone might have known that," said Lilian pettishly. "What's that got to do with it, pray?"

"Why call carelessness bad luck?" I asked. "You knew water would turn the stone green."

"Bad luck is coming," said Lilian solemnly, "or Etienne wouldn't have given me the stone of my month, my luck stone, in a ring. That was the first sign. Of course I forgot to take it off when I ought;

that was the second sign. The third was its change of color. Now comes misfortune."

She drew her handkerchief from her pocket as she spoke, and with it a letter, which fell to the floor. I picked it up and recognized the handwriting.

"Bertie Fayne!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, Bertie Fayne," said Lilian, snatching the letter from my hand. "What does he say? Nothing, as usual. Now don't poke and pry, Theo. He sends his love to you, and a lot of rot about childhood-memories, and so forth. I wish he'd write to you instead of me; I'm not interested in him, goodness knows!"

I asked no questions, although I wished very much to know where Herbert was, and what he was doing. Somehow since my marriage I had thought often of my old playfellow, who had taken no notice of it, or of me. I had fancied that, my father being gone, he would wish to revisit Braithe and renew his old intimacy. This was the first letter Lilian had, to my knowledge, received from him since I had become Theodora Rappelle. What did he think of this odd change of masters at Braithe? Of the great-grandson of our great-great-great-grandfather's henchman becoming Lord of the Manor—and of the Head of the Braithes?

"Anyone but Etienne," said Lilian, breaking in upon my musings with fresh complaints, "would have had enough *sabe* to have thought of that, and have given me something else. A pendant, say, or a bracelet."

"You chose a ring yourself," I said, indignant. "Etienne told me to ask you which you would prefer; and you might have had the pendant, or the bracelet."

"I dare say you suggested those miserable little things, Theo, when all the time you knew perfectly well I wanted a necklace. But no, Mrs. Rappelle

must have diamonds, and pearls, and necklaces; and I, I am only Miss Braithe; turquoises are good enough for her! She's not the wife of a rich grocer. No, thank God, I'm not; I'm a Braithe of Braithe!"

"What's the matter?" asked Janey, thrusting in her golden head.

"Nothing, Pet," I said quickly. "Come in and bring the Chevalier."

"He's agitated," said Jane. "Come, Charles Stuart! Him feels the thunder in his boneses, poor chappie! Come to his Theo, and tell her all about it!"

The poor Chevalier, nervous and careworn, slunk into the room, seated himself firmly on a fold of my gown, and shivered violently. Thunder storms were an agony to him; during them he spent his time seeking safety under my bed, and scrambling out again to see if Janey and I still lived. Driven by extreme terror to leave us, his sheep, his collie soul was wrung by our peril, and conscience would not allow him to desert us utterly.

Lilian, angry at the entrance of the others, flounced from the room.

"I'm glad she's gone," said Jane, climbing up on my lap. "She's turned the corners down," touching my lips with loving fingers, "and they'd begun to stay up all the time again. That's because I've been keeping,

> 'Sandalphon, the Angel of Glory,
> Sandalphon, the Angel of Prayer;'

busy lately, carrying mine in to God. 'Not in garlands of purple and red, please, Great Angel,' I said, 'but just the prayers, straight off, as I say them.' I've always thought," said the child, looking dreamily out of the window at the darkening landscape, "I've always thought Sandalphon did a queer thing, jumbling up everybody's prayers into wreaths that way. Still," sighing, "I suppose he has to obey orders, and he

needs something to cheer him, like flowers, standing up to his knees in corpses all the time."

"Janey!"

"It says so, Theo.

> 'Among the dead angels, the deathless
> Sandalphon stands listening breathless.'

Just like poor Charles Stuart listening for the first peal of thunder," said Janey calmly, "and it can't be pleasant for the Angel. Yes, I've prayed to God himself to make you happy, Theo; to God himself, who put us all here, and not to poor Christ the Lord, who tries to straighten out the Almighty's mistakes. I suppose it was hard making a world for the first time, hurrying about it so, too, getting it all done in a week, and then beginning it with a Jew family—such a queer start off! No, I shan't bother Jesus; all children are doing it incessantly, with their:

> 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Listen to a little child.'

And besides them, widows, and orphans, and big men-sinners scared of God. People are mean to Jesus Christ, yes, hateful and mean, at him all the time just because he's sweet and good. No, I pray to God, and I guess He'll feel He must pay some attention to a hunchbacked-orphan-child!"

"Kind little sister, to pray for me," I said gently, stroking her beautiful golden hair, and feeling powerless to cope with her strange fancies. How might I dare to question what prayers flew straight to the great All-Father? What was I but a faulty creature by the side of this pure-hearted little child? Surely her prayers had brought me peace, for since our return to Braithe I had read only respect in Etienne Rappelle's watchful eyes.

"Etienne's so funny!" said Janey suddenly. "Her-

vey, too. Etienne treats you as if you were a bird with a broken wing, and Hervey—" the child began to laugh—" 'Hervey,' I said, t'other day, 'my sister Theo is the apple of your eye.' 'She is, Miss Janey,' says Hervey, 'let any mote or beam dare dart therein and I'll pluck 'em out and show 'em accordingly.' Hush! What was that? Thunder?"

Charles Stuart's toenails were distinctly heard as, darting into the adjoining room, he clawed his hasty way under the bed. A gentle knock at the door, and Hervey entered.

"Mr. Rappelle's compliments to Miss Jane, and will she favor him with a game of euchre, in the library? The shutters there," confidentially, "are closed, and the lamps burn brightly." Then, as Janey ran away, "Miss Jane is a trifle timid, though, through pride fearing a fall in the loss of others' estimation, will let the fox gnaw on at any point. And," moving toward the window, "seeing you can't tell where the lightning will strike a man dumb, or lady either, I'll close the shutters."

Having accomplished this task, and lighted the candles on my dressing-table, Hervey stood gazing reflectively at me, his head on one side, his odd deprecatory smile playing about his lips.

"When first I came," he said musingly, "I thought 'twould be damp, but now, thinking of that appalling disaster, I'm glad it's stone. Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a good fire-escape when heated red-hot to the touch."

The disaster to which Hervey alluded had occurred only the week before; a hotel fire, in which many had lost their lives. The whole country was mourning over the sickening horrors of the holocaust.

"They say now," Hervey continued, " 'twas set on fire by thieves. Put not your trust in men, for some are devils, nor set a thief to catch these same, but an

honest man, who can see through the eye of a needle in a haystack. I'd like to have the roasting of them under the greenwood tree, seeing it burns slowly, and dry wood don't. Ah, what a peal was that!" as the thunder suddenly crashed over Braithe. "Did I hear carriage wheels, Mrs. Rappelle?" And he ran downstairs.

I followed, going half-way down to listen. The next moment a tall, handsome man stood in the brightly lighted hall, and I, running to meet him, both hands outstretched in welcome, cried, in a voice where tears and laughter mingled:

"Bertie! Oh, Bertie Fayne!"

What to me that lightning flashed and thunder roared, or that the floodgates of heaven seemed opened! I paid no attention to the terrible violence of the storm, as I looked up through tear-dimmed eyes, and with happy smiles, at my old playmate, who, for the moment, had brought back my childhood. He was as glad, apparently, to see me again. We stood in the centre of the great hall, laughing, shaking hands, exclaiming, as though we were both as young and jubilant as when we had parted, years before.

"You have changed very little," I said at last, "save that you have grown very tall, and your hair is a trifle darker.

"I've changed more inside," he said, with his sunny smile. "The seed you laboriously planted—a grain of mustard seed, wasn't it?—has sprouted vigorously. But, dear me, Theo, what a beauty you are! A regular out-and-outer, as we used to say. Are you as strict a Puritan as ever?"

I shook my head.

"Not for others," I said. "I hope I have grown more tolerant. But where is your trunk?"

I was told that my cousin had proposed putting up

at the Gills'. Then, seeing his face change suddenly, I turned, to find Etienne approaching, with Janey, from the library. My gay spirits fell as quickly as they had risen, and, as I went through the ceremony of introduction, I ceased to be Theo Braithe, and became Mrs. Etienne Rappelle.

The two men presented a marked contrast as they stood, facing each other, before the great chimney. Herbert Fayne's brilliant beauty made Etienne's dark face look almost grim in its stern, square outlines, and, as Etienne was of medium height, Herbert's inches caused him to appear short. But his greeting to his wife's cousin was perfect, and showed that he knew how to mingle stateliness with cordiality.

He would not hear of Herbert leaving us for the Gills, but begged him to make Braithe his headquarters. Herbert accepted, with his old boyish grace of manner and then, detecting Janey hiding in the background, demanded an introduction. The child hung back, always shy about meeting strangers, because of her misfortune.

"Please come and make friends with me," pleaded Herbert, in his sweet voice. "I've heard so much about my little cousin Janey."

"Very well," said Jane, slowly advancing from her corner, "then I might as well get it over at once. I'm rather a shock to people, Cousin Herbert, as a general thing, and like to let them down easy."

She shook hands gravely, but drew back when he offered to kiss her.

"We'd better wait to see how we get on, first," she said solemnly, "before going as far as that."

"I'm sorry I don't please you better," said Herbert plaintively.

"It's not your fault, Cousin Herbert. You can't help looking like Old Vivian, and having father's voice, any more than I can help having a crooked spine. Ap-

pearances don't amount to much, they say, but—somehow—we have to get used to 'em."

Charles Stuart, rushing down the stairs at this juncture, created a happy diversion. To be sure, upset by the storm, he failed to recognize Herbert as a guest, and showed a lively desire to turn him from the door. Janey, shocked by this gross lack of hospitality, cuffed the Chevalier, and made him apologize by giving his paw, which he did with much suppressed growling, and intense unwillingness.

"The thunder distracts him," said Janey. "I'm sorry he's so rude. Go upstairs, Charles Stuart, and pray for forgiveness under Theo's bed." The Chevalier obeyed with suspicious alacrity. "It's the only place that soothes his nerves," explained Jane gravely, "and I suppose we all have our moments of savagery."

It was high time to dress for dinner, so Janey and I went upstairs, she running to tell the Chevalier that the storm was passing, and I to inform Lilian of Herbert's arrival. In this she took small interest apparently, being too much worried by the change in her turquoise to think of anything else.

"Go away, Marie," she said to her maid, who was bathing her forehead with cologne, "go away! I want to see Mrs. Rappelle alone. Theo," as the door closed behind the woman, "go and lock it. I want you to promise me something; now, at once, this minute, before I go mad with fretting. Get my Testament." I obeyed. "Now swear, by this Book, that you will never tell Etienne, or anybody, anything I may choose to confide to your keeping."

"I can't, Lilian," I said; "you might tell me something that concerned Janey, or Etienne, deeply."

"Nonsense, what a fool you are! I mean my own affairs, of course. What do I care about them? There, it's just like you, after always saying you never want to meddle with other people's lives! I've got a right

to manage my own affairs my own way, haven't I, Theo Braithe?"

"Yes, Lilian."

"Do you want to go 'round screeching my concerns at the top of your lungs to everybody?"

"No, Lilian."

"Then swear."

I yielded, as was my custom when Lilian's nerves were on edge; I took my oath to keep her petty, childish secrets. She dismissed me at once, saying she would have her dinner upstairs and not come down again.

"What shall I say to Bertie for you?" I asked.

"Tell him to go to the devil," she said crossly.

I met Hervey as I went downstairs.

"Where have you put Mr. Fayne?" I asked.

"Below," he said, pointing downward. "Bachelor room south of front door, Mrs. Rappelle. He may like to meet the sun the dewy lawn upon in early walks."

"He has grown up even handsomer than he promised as a boy," I said, half to myself and half to Hervey.

"Humph—all that glitters is not broken glass bottles, of course—still—" and Hervey shook his head. Evidently my kinsman had failed to please.

Later, at dinner, I saw that Monsieur Randoce was not prepossessed in Herbert's favor, for the ends of the gay Frenchman's mustache drooped. Janey called this mustache *La Girouette,* since by its upward, or downward curve, you learned at once of the good or bad spirits of its wearer. Scarcely had we been at table for a half hour when the tips of *La Girouette* were dragged down; Monsieur Randoce had grown melancholy. Herbert, on the contrary, was bright and charming; and in spite of Lilian's absence, my enforced silence, and the sulkiness of Monsieur Randoce, the dinner passed off gayly. When I went to my room

I was far happier than usual; Herbert's coming had brought me a new lightness of heart.

At two o'clock that night I was aroused by hearing the Chevalier—he slept in my room—snuffing under the crack of my door. Thinking instantly of Janey, fearing she might be ill, I sprang from my bed, and running to the door opened it quickly. Charles Stuart, wagging his tail, ran forward to greet Lilian, who was stealing softly upstairs. At sight of me she looked frightened, but hastened to explain that, being hungry, she had gone down to the pantry in search of food.

"And I wish I were dead!" she continued, beginning to cry. "And I want you to come into my room, Theo, and sleep with me to-night."

XIII

It was long before Lilian, weeping against my shoulder, became calm enough to sleep; and when, at last, her deep breathing told me that her nervous attack was over for the time, her frequent low cries of discomfort showed that her brain had not found complete repose, even in her heavy slumber. I thought the upset condition of her nerves was due to the state of the atmosphere—for the thunder growled all night—and I was glad, indeed, when I woke in the morning, to find the sky blue overhead. Not that there had been a good clearing, for, as on the day previous, big dunderbergs peeped at us from over the western hills. Still I hoped that a long morning nap might steady Lilian, so I crept from her room gently and warned her maid to let her sleep late.

Herbert was not at breakfast. Hervey said that he had had an early cup of coffee, and then pulled across the river in a light rowboat. Neither was Mr. Brace visible, he having had a summons from one of his poor people. Mr. Brace had already become a factor for much good among the brickmakers' families, in the small settlement a mile down the river. Monsieur Randoce always breakfasted in his room; so Etienne, Janey, and I were alone.

Little Jane chatted away in her usual lively fashion, directing her talk to Etienne, as she had grown accustomed to obeying Lilian's command not to "tempt Theo to gabble." Etienne was kind and attentive to the child, as always; and, finding myself an outsider, I became so much absorbed in my own thoughts that I started when, breakfast being over, Etienne sud-

denly asked if I would give him a few moments in the library. I rose at once and went with him across the hall. I was much surprised to see him, after we had entered his sanctum, close the outer door of baize before he shut the inner mahogany one. This outside door meant "no admittance" to the household; and I wondered, uncomfortably, what was coming.

The big room looked pleasant and homelike. Both great windows stood wide, letting in the sweet morning air, laden with the perfume of the rain-drenched flowers of the window-boxes. From above the chimney-piece Vivian, builder of our Braithe, looked down upon me, with the eyes of his descendant—Herbert Fayne. The two men were, certainly, marvellously alike, I thought, as I stood in the centre of the great room and looked earnestly up at the portrait. Yes, put Herbert in a coat of black velvet, with ruffled shirt-front and powdered hair; oblige him to part with the tawny mustache that hid his Grecian mouth—full-lipped, almost sneering—and you would have Old Vivian to the life. Had Herbert shaken off the Braithe nature, as I so hoped? Could he, with his Braithe face?

"Theo," said Etienne gravely, "I am about to ask a favor of you—but pray sit down."

He motioned me to take the chair of Vivian, but I moved toward the east window, instead. The coming interview was, I saw, to be unpleasant, and I had no desire to be seated. No, I preferred to stand close by the window, where I might, now and then, refresh myself with a look at my old friend, the river, flowing calmly, grandly, inland, with its large message from the sea. The river might lend me courage, it looked so strong. Etienne took up his position on the hearth-rug, directly below my ancestor's portrait, and continued:

"I wish, Theo, to relinquish the part you have as-

signed to me"—I turned from the river—"the part of ogre and—fool."

"I don't understand," I said faintly.

"I wish also," he went on, paying no attention to my protest, "to beg you to drop the rôle of Patient Grissel. It does not suit your style."

"Really, Etienne——"

He interrupted me irritably, almost fiercely.

"Don't insult me, pray, by pretending you don't understand. When I'm not by you are gay, talkative. When your cousin came, last night, you were yourself. 'Dear me!' said little Jane; 'just listen to Theo! Who's come, I wonder? Hear her ripple laugh! Doesn't it sound nice? Just like old times.' I entered the hall; what followed? Instantly you became the repressed, sad-eyed creature—but there—" he broke off, was silent a moment, then added: "Will you kindly inform me why you wish me not to know your real self? Will you tell me why you are so anxious to keep down your natural manner? Ah!" scrutinizing me keenly; "perhaps you fear I may fall a victim to your charms!"

"Etienne!" I cried, flushing hotly.

"So that is it?" he spoke with bitter amusement. "Yes, I see it is; your face and eyes are tell-tales, Theo. I think you forget, my dear, that I am not an unfledged school-boy; I have seen a great deal of the world. I am forty-two years old—perhaps you thought me younger?"

He stopped speaking, he expected an answer. He received none. My indignation was rising under the lash of his irony.

"Oblige me by telling me if you knew my age?"

If I knew the age of *the* Rappelle! An absurd question surely. Poor Mr. Beecham, I remembered, had said Mr. Rappelle was "not yet forty"—poor Mr. Beecham fearing an elderly suitor might shock my

girlish mind! But I had always known everything I could learn about the Rappelles.

"Did you know, Theo?"

I bowed.

"Yet you thought me vulnerable! Why, I am a multi-millionaire, Theo, and have always been considered an excellent *parti*. Many a match-making mother has marked me for her own. I am grown a very wary old bird, child, and am not in the least susceptible, I assure you."

I wondered, not for the first time, if he had ever been very much in love—finding time for this thought even in the midst of my vexation and shame. I was very much ashamed.

"So you see," he went on, slowly, "you may set your mind at rest about me—and my heart. Having never experienced the grand passion, I may hope to escape it altogether. But you are very handsome, and it was only natural, after all, that you should judge real men by the heroes of fiction. I ought to be grateful for your desire not to place me in the wretched position of an unloved lover."

I, naturally, made no comment.

"From now on, Theo, I shall ask you to forget me—and my susceptible heart—and to enjoy yourself after your own fashion. But let me beg you to sit down; there are several other things I wish to speak about." He dragged forward the great armchair of Old Vivian, and again motioned me to seat myself in it.

"No, please, Etienne," I said, gently, "that is your chair now." I did not add that I detested it, it being difficult to drop my old rôle at once.

"On the contrary," he said, coldly, "it is all your own, as the eldest living Braithe."

"How lovely these roses are!" I said, and going to the table I bent over an old green punch-bowl, heaped full of fragrant beauties.

"Yes," he assented, "roses are always—beautiful."

"Beautiful, indeed!" I murmured; then, turning a little, so that I could look into the eyes of the strange man standing by the great carved armchair, the man who was so sure he was invulnerable, I laid my cheek lightly against the roses—the deep red, the pale pink, the creamy roses—that filled the old green bowl almost to overflowing, and added dreamily, "Leaves of velvet, fragrant velvet, soft—summer-scented! Have you always been fond of—roses, Etienne?"

"Yes," he said, slowly, "always."

His eyes were so brilliant, and he kept them upon me so steadily, that my own fell. I busied myself selecting a flower for my hair.

"Do you, too, like to feel the soft touch of their velvety petals against your cheek?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said, "I have never tried."

I had found the flower I wished, a half-blown rose; fragrant, palest pink; and, standing beside the table, I looked up earnestly at Old Vivian as I put the blossom in my hair. I wore a sheer white linen, trimmed lavishly with beautiful flower embroidery (dubbed lace, because the heavy background is cut away), with great puffed sleeves, coming only to the elbow; and the neck, half high, cut square, both back and front, like those gowns worn by the women in old Italian pictures. A charming frock, indeed, almost a fancy dress, since my dressmaker had allowed her fancy to run riot. Had the cold-eyed man of the portrait cared to see his wife in pretty gowns, I wondered? Would he have taken her to task had she failed to bring him a heavy dressmaker's bill? Did his servant's descendant, now ruler of Braithe and the Braithes, approve of my white finery?

"The rose is perfectly placed," said a hard voice. "Will you kindly sit here?"

I flashed around upon my husband, vexed that my effort to avoid doing what he wished had failed.

"So be it," I said, seating myself in the chair of state, and leaning my head against the new ruby velvet of the high carved back, "since you prefer it. A footstool, please."

I spoke imperiously, although kindly, as to a dependent. Etienne brought the footstool, placed it beneath my feet, and was about to return to his position before the chimney-piece, when, thrusting out my dainty slippers—how different from the shabby, patched shoes of the past winter! —I said, looking at them disapprovingly: "They are dusty, yes, really quite dusty. Kindly remove this dust with your handkerchief, Etienne."

I did not raise my eyes, but kept them fixed upon the silver buckles of my high-heeled slippers; slippers quite free from dust speck, beautifully clean.

Etienne came forward, dropped upon one knee before me, and slowly, very slowly, dusted my shining slippers with a snowy handkerchief. He knelt gracefully, a difficult feat. I wondered how he would look were he down upon both knees.

"Do they please you now?" he asked, looking up at me with keen, questioning eyes. He had finished his task, but did not rise.

"Yes," I said, tilting my head a little, as if to judge the result of his work the better, "yes, they will do very well, thanks."

He placed a hand on either arm of the chair, steadying himself and imprisoning me, and said, slowly:

"What do you wish me to understand by this?"

I smiled, but made no answer.

"You consider this my proper place, Theo?"

"If this chair is mine," I said, "yes. If, as a Braithe, I am to fill this chair, I must behave as such. As my mother's daughter, I behave, think, feel, differently;

the dust upon my slippers remains, or is flicked away with my own handkerchief. As a Braithe? Why, naturally, I use the hands, the handkerchief, of a Rappelle. A Rappelle must not let a Braithe do aught but idle. You place me here—take the consequences. You force me into this position—behold your own!"

His steady gaze brought the color to my face, but I looked into his eyes, smiling. My Braithe demon held sway. It was for the man who had summoned to exorcise it. He had commanded me to be my old self; I obeyed him. He rose slowly, and stood upon the hearth-rug as before; he still looked earnestly at me.

"In this chair," I continued, staring dreamily before me, "I am dowered with the memories of past events in the lives of my grandfathers. The wealth garnered in their noble minds is handed on to me. Dear me, dear me, how well I remember (as Old Vivian) the night I looted the English Braithe House! I can see my lovely Sophia now, as she stood, her sweet blue eyes upraised to mine, asking me if I could not squeeze into my pocket just one thing more; the stocking in which my dear old nurse kept her little savings! Sophia had drawn it, so cleverly, from under the good old soul's pillow. I remember——"

"Theo!" cried Etienne, greatly shocked; "how can you feel so bitterly toward the Braithes? A fine old race—they had their faults, of course, but——"

"One moment, please," I said, holding up my hand to enjoin silence, "give me just one moment, Etienne, before you continue your praises of my race. As a Braithe, with my hands upon the family Leopards of the family chair (a leopard couchant formed each arm), I may tell you, quite plainly—since you excuse Braithe failings—that Mr. Braithe misinformed you in regard to me. From my fourteenth until my twen-

ty-first birthday I saw many people; going from pension to pension in Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy. People, Etienne, are the same in pensions as in palaces—I know them well. Yes, I think, that here, in this chair of Vivian de Vere Braithe, I may say to you that I am well accustomed to the society of —men. Indeed, I have had much experience, Etienne, of men—and their ways. And I think I ought to add, that I have been called an 'arrant flirt,' a 'hardened coquette,' even—'dangerous!' "

By the time I had finished speaking I knew that my face was white; my hands trembled on the Leopards' slippery backs, and I could no longer look at Etienne. However, he had the truth—at last. How would he take it?

A chair was drawn close to mine, and Etienne, seating himself, said gently, but with an odd inflection, that puzzled me, in his voice, "When you lifted your arms to put that rose in your hair, Theo, did you know what a picture you made?"

I did not answer. I was afraid. With this man, who was my husband, I had lost the weapons that I had handled so easily when free. My power seemed gone. He lifted my left hand from its place on the Leopard's head, and held it close.

"You are like a rose, Theo. How many must have told you so! What a cold little hand, my dear; are these white embroideries too cool? What flashed so brightly under them, on this arm? Ah!" he put his free hand beneath my arm, just above my elbow, where I had wound—thinking it would be out of sight—the diamond chain that held my opal. "The Gypsy's Opal!" in pretended astonishment, and suddenly tightening his grasp upon hand and arm, said, "and on a gypsy; I kiss it for good luck."

Bending his head he kissed, not the gem, but the bend of my arm within the elbow; did this so insult-

ingly that in an instant I had flung him off, and gained the middle of the room. I was almost beside myself with anger.

"How dare you!" I cried, stamping my foot. "Oh, how dare you!" I could speak no further, passion choked me.

Etienne rose slowly and faced me.

"How dared you tell me a falsehood, Theo?"

He spoke so calmly, and a smile of such sardonic amusement played about his lips, that my anger increased.

"I? A falsehood? When?" I cried, tears of wrath in my eyes, my cheeks aflame.

"Just now," he said, composedly, "when you gave me to understand that for seven years you flirted with the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys of European boarding-houses."

"But I did," I said, quickly, "and you ought to know it."

Etienne's smile of amusement deepened; he raised his eyebrows in mock astonishment, as he said, "What, so out of practice, from two years of seclusion, that you have forgotten how to take a kiss? For a person of seven years' experience, that is a little strange. Why, look! at the mere mention of my kiss—a husband's kiss, too, so a tame one—you blush as hotly as a school-girl. Why did you tell me such a fib, Theo? One so easily found out, too."

As he spoke my anger was dominated by surprise at the way in which he had taken my words. I was horrified by his interpretation, and by the strange means he had used to test me. Had I remembered that to some people the word flirting meant permitting such liberties as stolen kisses, and the like—milkmaid coquetries—I could never have made my confession. Yet how explain?

"You thought I had let—people treat me so—so

familiarly?" I faltered, almost too much ashamed by his ideas of me to speak at all.

"You said so, Theo."

"Is that your idea of—of flirtation, Etienne?"

"Accepting a kiss, you would say, Theo? Why yes, that's about it, isn't it?"

I took out my handkerchief and dried my eyes. My anger toward him was gone; his ignorance had won my pardon, had gained my sympathy. He had done quite right to try me—under the circumstances. How disgusting my words must have been to him; how anxious he must have been to quickly disprove them. Kissing, indeed! So he feared he had saddled himself with that vulgar creature, a hand-squeezing, kissing, ogling flirt! Poor, poor Etienne! I must have vexed him sadly—but, dear me, how much he had yet to learn!

"I'm sorry to have been disagreeable, Etienne," I said, gently, "when you are so kind, too. I am, indeed, grateful for all you have done for my sisters—for my little Jane. She is very fond of her brother-in-law." I smiled at him wistfully, anxious, at last, to please.

Etienne frowned, took a turn to the window and back again, sighed, then said resignedly:

"I suppose there's no use in begging you to drop that word, Theo, since it seems to be the chief one in your vocabulary."

"What word, Etienne?" He was a most surprising man—I found him interesting.

"Gratitude—I hate it— It's out of place between you and me— There, I don't wish to be cross, Theo, but you are very trying at times."

"I know it, Etienne," I said, meekly, shaking my head and sighing over my deficiencies, "very trying, indeed."

He laughed, but uncomfortably.

"As I said before, Theo," he spoke impatiently, "I

wish you would forget me, and try to enjoy yourself a little. I had hoped you might take pleasure in your gewgaws—most women care for such nonsense. You don't, it seems."

"But I do," I protested. "I've already told you that I love pretty things, Etienne. I am even foolishly fond of purple and fine linen."

"Ah!" he stared at me a long moment; "if that is true, you surprise me, Theo. Why, then, may I ask, do you so seldom wear your jewels?"

I had no wish to tell him the real reason, and, no nonsense coming to my lips, I remained silent.

"Then it is because I gave them, I suppose," he added, grimly.

In my sudden desperation I found my tongue—he must not be allowed to believe this truth.

"I will wear them all this evening," I said, smiling, yet flushing in my embarrassment, "all. You shall see me covered with jewels, monseigneur. Now, are you pleased?"

He looked at me curiously, as though I puzzled him. I felt suddenly at my ease, and oddly gay.

"Mrs. Rappelle shall be magnificent to-night," I added, lightly. "You will not recognize Theo Braithe in that *grande dame.*"

"Theo Braithe," said Etienne, slowly, "can shine all the Rappelle diamonds down."

I swept him a low courtesy. "Not another word, please," I said. "Let me fly, before the echo of that charming compliment dies away."

He was not beside me when I reached the door, but, as I glanced back over my shoulder, smiling, hastened forward and opened it for me; he did not speak, however.

Outside, in the hall, I found Hervey, perched on the top of a tall step-ladder, busily engaged in rubbing up the letters of the verse above the chimney-piece.

I looked up at him, nodding a greeting, and, thinking my hair felt a trifle loose, patted it here and there. Ah! my rose was gone. I glanced about the floor; then, not finding it, tapped on the library door, opening it at the same time. Etienne was bending over his desk.

"I have lost my rose," I cried. "Have you seen it, Etienne?"

He did not look around, but said absently, and as if anxious to avoid interruption, "A rose? I do not see it, Theo."

"No matter," I said, hastily, sorry for my thoughtless intrusion, "it is of no consequence," and closing the door noiselessly, found Hervey looking down at me with his deprecatory smile.

"One man's loss," he said, as if to himself, "is another man's—rose."

"'Gain,' goosie Hervey!" cried Janey, hanging over the gallery railing—"rose, forsooth! You mean 'gain.'"

Hervey returned to his work.

"My luve's like a red, red rose,"

piped Jane in her sweet treble, dropping, as she sang, a great red rose on my head.

The Chevalier, thinking it thrown for his amusement, descended the staircase in a rush, but I had already stuck the flower in my hair.

"It looks pretty in your dusky tresses," said my small sister, as she followed the Chevalier slowly. "What was the color of the lost one? Oh, here's Etienne"—he came quickly from the library. "Where are you going, Etienne?"

"To Hilltown, little Jane," said Etienne, adding kindly, "Do you want to go, too?"

"No, thank you," said Jane, leaning against me, drawing both my arms around her, and folding my

hands across her bosom; "no, Etienne. I am going to gather roses with Theo—but we won't take too many from the garden, we won't gather all, Etienne."

"One can't gather all," said Etienne. He did not look at the child, but at the rose in my hair.

"One, can't," said Jane, "nor two, perhaps; but three people, I think, could ravage a garden, especially when one is a male Braithe."

"What do you mean, Jane?" demanded Etienne, in astonishment.

"Only that Herbert is waiting for us by the sundial," said the child, composedly, "and he's an out-and-out Braithe, if his name is Fayne. However, I'll look out for your roses, Etienne, so don't worry."

XIV

The garden at Braithe had been as tastefully cared for as house and chapel, all its quaint beauty preserved. The old-fashioned flowers, the circle of turf in its centre, with the moss-grown sun-dial, had not been disturbed. Some of the box edging the paths between the fancifully cut flower-beds had had to give place, because of its bulky growth, to new, smaller bushes—but box was replaced by box. It was the same in regard to the hedge of arbor vitæ that inclosed the small square. Where the trees had died from overcrowding by lusty neighbors new ones were put in, but these same big neighbors were left standing, to lift their beautiful dark points as high as they willed.

To the south a belt of splendid forest trees stretched between garden and chapel, and a pretty path, running through this woodland, connected the two. On the east an opening in the hedge led into my new rose-garden. Here, on this sweep of lawn edging the plateau, grew fine old tulip-trees, oaks, sycamores, and maples; their lower branches trimmed high, so that one looked between their tall trunks, as through rows of stately pillars, at the broad river—and away to its distant hills. Everywhere, with artistic carelessness, rose-bushes had been planted; while great beds of monthly roses showed that we were to rejoice in fragrant blossoms even when June, their special season, was past.

Little Jane and I went to the old garden to keep tryst with Herbert; but he was not by the sun-dial. Janey, closing the gate in the hedge with elaborate

caution (a tall old-fashioned iron gate, shaped like a harp), motioned me to make no noise.

"Hush!" she murmured, laying a small forefinger against her lips. "I forgot to prepare you for the change. It makes him look like Guido's Apollo—same queer smile seems to grow 'round his mouth, as if he were half laughing, half sneering, at someone —in his sleeve, you know, not outright. Of course it must have been there, part of the time, last night, but the mustache hid it. I think he was foolish to do it, Theo, but after his upper lip tans a bit it won't look so white and queer."

Then I understood that Herbert had parted with his mustache.

"Guido's Apollo," mused the child, "driving in his careless chariot, surrounded by fat women, walking. I wonder are clouds like soft, heavy sea-sand, giving way under one's feet, and tiresome? I've always thought that Apollo was a lazy sybarite; he might have let those women take turns driving, and walked himself. But he wasn't an American, poor creature, so we must make allowances for his rude, greedy ways. Dear me, how hot the sun is here!—Let's go into the rose-garden. I wish Herbert would come and amuse us."

"Does your back ache, pet?" I asked, anxiously.

"Yes—but don't you fret about me, Theo. You'd better worry over Randoce, fiery mad in his studio at the stables because you don't appear."

I had, indeed, forgotten my appointment.

"There," said Jane, "don't bother about him; I want you to play with me." She drew me with her into the rose-garden to where, beneath the trees, a gay Mexican hammock swung. "Please lie down, Theo, so—" heaping bright-colored cushions beneath my head. "I'm going to take down your hair and turn you into the Sleeping Beauty."

"O Jane!" I remonstrated, "it's so hot; and what if somebody comes?"

"Who can?" demanded the child, removing my hairpins with dainty fingers. "Etienne's in Hilltown, Lilian in the sulks, Randoce in his studio, Herbert in——"

"Heaven, I think," said a pleasant voice, as Herbert himself strolled up, "but I'm afraid I'm not wanted—yet the fair maiden invited me to meet her by the sun-dial!"

"You weren't on time," said Jane severely, "but you may stay now you're here," motioning toward a basket-chair near us. "You don't mind him, Theo," speaking under her breath. "He must have seen you with your hair hanging down loads of times when you were young."

I smiled up at my darling; since in her eagerness she had forgotten her pain, by all means let her play her play out. Herbert sank luxuriously into the chair and clasped his hands behind his head. I looked at him with much interest, feeling a strong desire to know something of his life, and of him. He was handsomer than ever without his mustache. He returned my look with equal interest.

"A penny for your thoughts, Dolly!" he said.

"Why do you call her that?" asked Janey, ceasing in her work of destruction to stare at Herbert curiously.

"Because she was once my little cousin," said Herbert, "and that's one of my old pet names for her. Helen of Troy was another—for Theodora, Gift of God. Dear me! I had one of my biggest fights with Jimmy Wylde over that."

"Tell about it," urged Jane, squeezing herself down beside me in the hammock, "please tell."

Herbert smiled good-naturedly at the child. "You must know, Cousin Janey," he said, glancing at me,

"that, as a child, your sister Theo was a gay coquette —doubtless she has changed——"

"Yes," interrupted Jane, sighing profoundly, "she's had to, since she's married."

"You regret the necessity?" asked Herbert, quickly.

"Yes," said Jane, sighing again. "I ought not to, but 'twas so amusing. My mother always said Theo flirted artistically, yet was so unconscious of her power, and so horrified by what she'd done, that she was funny. I know that by heart, Mummy said it so often—— Go on about Jim, please."

"James Wylde," said Herbert, obediently, "was devoted to Theo, and being told by someone the meaning of her name, repeated it, proudly, to me."

"Yes," said Jane, "of course."

"I said," Herbert went on, slowly, "that God's gift, then, was like the famous apple that set three goddesses at loggerheads; only, seeing Theo was the gift, men, not women, would be set by the ears. I added that she was, already, a little flirt; and Jim punched my head with horrid promptitude."

"Who beat?" asked Jane, eagerly.

"James," said Herbert, gravely, "because he was in deadly earnest and I—wasn't."

I seized this opportunity to tell Herbert about poor Jim, and of my earnest desire that he should return home and amend his ways.

"I've seen him lately," said Herbert, gently, "and put him in the way of earning his living."

"Bertie," I cried, "how nice of you! Where is he? What is he doing?"

"Hadn't you better wait until he comes to tell you himself?" was the kindly answer. "I don't want to steal Jim's pleasure."

I was charmed with this evidence of Herbert's goodness of heart. How greatly he had changed, and as I had hoped he might. I looked at him affection-

ately; I felt proud of my cousin. He returned my approving smile, and asked Jane why she was pulling my hair down.

"She's to be the Sleeping Beauty," Jane explained, "but she's shy about having her hair hanging loose. I guess you've seen her that way before, though, Bertie."

Herbert smiled at the child's sudden adoption of his nickname—he seemed well pleased, and I liked him the more for his evident desire to gain Janey's approval.

"She wore it hanging loose when I knew her," he said, "and once I saw it soaking wet."

"When?" cried Jane, all interest again.

"A cat," said Herbert, solemnly, "came to Braithe. Theo said she wished it would go home. Anxious to please, I popped it into a bag and, not knowing its earthly home, went to the river to send it to Cat Heaven, when—Theo appeared on the scene."

"You wanted to drown it?" shrieked Jane. "Oh, how awfully cruel!"

"So Dolly said," continued Herbert, "but I—I beg you will remember that I was but a rude, disagreeable boy at the time——"

"How old?" interrupted Jane.

"Oh! fifteen or sixteen," said Herbert.

"Old enough to have known better," commented Jane.

"Yes," was the gentle answer, "you are quite right, my little cousin. I went from bad to worse, too," he continued, "for when Theo remonstrated, I heaved the bag high and would have chucked it off the dock, only—" he broke off, stared, wide-eyed, at the child, and added, "only something awful happened."

"Oh, what?" cried Janey. She was getting the amusement that she longed for.

"Your beautiful sister," said Herbert, dramatically,

"crying out, 'Then I'll drown, too!' flung herself headlong into the water."

"O Theo!" gasped poor Jane. "How dared you?"

"The Gift of God, at present reclining so gracefully in the hammock," explained Herbert, teasingly, "will dare anything when her blood is up—that's the reason Jim Wylde and I fell victims to her charms. But listen to the end of this thrilling adventure. A drowning girl—especially when she happens to be your own pretty cousin—is much more interesting than any cat, even if she hasn't nine lives to lose. Jane, I tore off my coat, and plunged in to the rescue! Yes, I saved her! Now, don't you admire me?"

"No," said Jane, scowling, "and I'm glad I didn't know you then."

"That was the first time Rappelle saw you, wasn't it, Dolly? Gracious, what a fury you looked, shaking your wet mane at me and stamping your foot! When he and Uncle Braithe appeared on the scene you scrambled up the bank, I remember, like the cat I had tried to drown, and disappeared."

I sat up in the hammock. "Etienne—saw me?" I exclaimed. "You must be mistaken, Bertie. Why, I never saw him until——" I stopped short. I had no wish to speak of my indecently hasty marriage.

"I'm not mistaken," persisted my cousin. "I'm not likely to forget that interview, since, though short, it was—intense. Lilian, I remember, had kindly rushed to the house to inform her dear papa of our little affair. She also released the incarcerated tabby; not from kindness toward animals, but from hatred of cousins. Figuratively speaking, Lilian is partial to that amusement."

"What amusement?" demanded Jane.

"The letting of cats out of bags, dear child."

"Yes," assented Jane, sighing, "that's so."

I was hurriedly going over the incidents of that

past morning; searching, searching, for a memory of my father's companion. I could find none, remembering only that Mr. Braithe had not come to the dock alone. Blinded by angry tears, as well as river water, I had seen no one distinctly save Herbert, my hated enemy of the moment. Etienne, I decided, had no more recollection of the childish squabble than I of his presence.

"Theo," said Herbert, suddenly, "if it's not a rude question, may I know if Mr. Rappelle holds the secrets of the House?"

By this he meant a knowledge of the By-Ways. "No," I said, "you forget that I alone have that right."

"I thought you might have told him; that he might have asked."

"Etienne respects the old traditions," I said, gravely.

"Old rot, to my thinking, Dolly."

"Yes," I assented, "but I am under oath."

"Unless a Braithe be in dire need," said Herbert, smiling.

I nodded.

"Creepy, crawly, dreadful, Braithe secrets," said Jane, shivering. "Sometimes at night I imagine I hear garments flutter-fluttering, or finger-nails scrape-scraping, behind the walls of my room; as if some awful thing were trying to find its way through those dark, narrow passages, into the house—ah!"

"Come," I said, hastily, "if I'm to be a Sleeping Princess, it's time you to went to work, Missy. My hair-pins are not all out yet."

"To be sure," said the child, forgetting her nightmares. "If you'd be kind enough to bring me what I want from the house, Cousin Herbert?—or wait, I'll go with you."

The two walked away hand in hand. The Chev-

alier, roused from his nap beneath my hammock, blinked lazily, disapprovingly, at this trotting about in hot weather, and, resettling himself, drowsed again.

It was a drowsy morning. The blue of the heavens was soft and misty, the few sunbeams, that made their way through the thickly leaved branches of the old trees, were not too dazzling; while the little south breeze seemed to be playing hide and seek in the canopy of greenery above me; so often did it cease its rustling and appear to hold its breath. The soft warmth brought out the delicious fragrance of the roses, the very air was steeped in sweetness. Through the stillness came the gentle sound of diminutive wavelets, cooing a faint lullaby along the shore.

I was almost asleep, when an indignant Frenchman bounced through the opening in the hedge. When I saw the fierce twist of *La Girouette* of Monsieur Randoce, I knew that I had really offended him; so I hastened to speak first, and smiled a welcome at the angry man, as I said how good it was of him to come and look me up.

"First Mr. Rappelle kept me talking of household matters, in the library," I explained, "and then Janey brought me out here. But I am glad I broke my appointment—it is too warm for you to work; do sit down."

With an odd, bewildered expression in his fine dark eyes, Monsieur Randoce dropped into the chair Herbert had vacated, and seemed at a loss for words.

I had a sincere liking for Monsieur Randoce; his geniality, his desire to please everyone with whom he chanced to be thrown, his good manners, and his really great talent as an artist, made him a delightful companion. Then, too, I felt grateful for the relief from overstrained nerves that I had found in his studio in town. His nonsense, I had long since decided, was but surface nonsense; so I showed my

liking, my friendly liking, plainly, never dreaming of being misunderstood.

"She is not here, the leetle sister?" he asked, at last, in his quaint way. I liked his accent, and his mistakes.

I explained where she had gone and for what purpose, and had hardly ceased speaking when Janey and Herbert, laughing, chatting, and appearing to have made great strides in intimacy since leaving me, returned. Monsieur Randoce, eying me suspiciously, said, fiercely:

"You did not mention heem!"

"Bertie?" I said, carelessly. "Oh, no! Bertie doesn't count—he's nothing but a cousin, Monsieur Randoce."

"Who doesn't count, Dolly?" asked Herbert, the sharpness of whose ears had tried me often before.

"You don't," I said, a trifle crossly.

"There, Jane, what did I tell you?" said Herbert, in his sunniest way. "Of course I can play Prince. Why can't Monsieur Randoce do the reading part? Good English lesson, I'm sure."

"The very thing," cried Jane. She looked happy, even joyous. I felt grateful to Herbert, who had worked this charm, and allowed him to spread an elaborately embroidered table-cover of ruby satin over me, without grumbling.

"The book says," quoth small Jane, opening a volume of Tennyson's poems that Herbert had dropped on the grass,

'The silk star-broidered coverlid,'

but we couldn't find one, so this will have to do. It ought to be purple, but there isn't one in the house—this came from the library; Etienne won't mind. Wait a minute, Bertie; oh, here we are,

'The maiden's jet-black hair has grown,'

and so forth.

'Forth streaming from a braid of pearl—'

Herbert, give me the pearls, please," and taking my long string of pearls from one of Herbert's pockets, she wound them in and out among my loosened locks, patting hair, table-cover, and me into shape. Then, returning to her book, read, seeking instruction:

'Glows forth each softly shadowed arm
With bracelets of the diamond bright.'

Now the bracelets, Herbert"—and I was further adorned. "Shut your eyes, Theo, and pretend you're asleep—ah! isn't she lovely? O my Theo, I wish you could see yourself! You're too sweet!—stop, stop, you mustn't smile like that, every dimple shows; do stop. Please, Monsieur Randoce, will you read, so that Herbert can play Prince nicely? See, here it says:

'He stoops—to kiss her—on his knee.'"

"No," interrupted Monsieur Randoce, "no, I weel not read!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Jane. "Why, I believe you're angry."

Herbert laughed. Monsieur Randoce sprang from his chair and walked quickly away. Herbert laughed again.

"Theodora—Gift of God!" he said, softly.

"He's coming back!" interrupted Jane; then, with an exclamation of relief, "No, it's Etienne!" She ran to meet him, pouring out her story of Monsieur Randoce's strange and sudden wrath, the scene to be played, and, at last, of her delight in his—Etienne's—coming. "For now we can go on. Herbert will make a beautiful Prince, don't you think?"

"No, no," said Herbert, hastily, "I'll read now, and Rappelle shall be Prince."

"I'm too old and ugly," said Etienne. "Don't let me change anything—play your parts out, I beg."

"You're not old—and you're not ugly," said small Jane, slowly, "but you do not look like a fairy Prince, Etienne. Still, you could really kiss the Princess, while Bertie would have to pretend."

"Oh," said Etienne, "so I might really give the real Princess a real kiss, though I'm not a real—Prince?"

"We might let the Princess choose," said Herbert, in an expressionless voice; "but no, I forgot, princesses never choose, do they? The giving of their kisses is arranged for them."

"Do they have to stand smothering to order?" I asked, lightly, flinging aside my silk covering, and sitting up. "Janey, I'm too warm for comfort. Mayn't I twist up my hair?"

"Passionate, slumbrous waves of hair!" said the child, looking at me dreamily. "Theo always makes me think of marble courtyards, with orange-trees, and pomegranate flowers, and silvery fountains—or of moonlit nights on old stone balconies, with swinging passion-flowers! Where is the Gypsy's Opal, the Hungarian opal, Theo? Mother said if ever you wore it, it would be the tell-tale of your heart."

I took it from my arm and gave it into the little hand. I could not speak; since when my baby sister talked thus strangely, showing so plainly her unlikeness to other young creatures, the pain in my heart held me dumb. The two men were as silent as I.

"Queer old Eternity!" said the child, smoothing with one small finger the dull gold snake that encircled the gem. "He never looks tired of being on guard. I'd hate to watch and ward all the time, wouldn't you, Etienne?"

"That would depend upon the value of the jewel I guarded, Janey."

"Is that the morning paper I see sticking out of your pocket, Rappelle?" asked Herbert, irrelevantly. "Any news?"

"More about the latest horror, that's all," was the answer.

"I know what that was," said Jane, her dreamy manner changing into one of alertness. "I heard the servants talking about it; a hotel set on fire by wicked thieves—I've prayed God to make a hell to roast them in."

"Janey!" I cried, horrified.

"Yes, Theo, because you think there isn't any hell. Not an old-fashioned, hot-as-hot, fire-and-brimstone hell; you know you said so; and what Hervey says is true, those men ought to be roasted slowly. Old fashions always come up again, Mrs. Gill says, and I hope that's true about the old-fashioned bad place."

"Dear me! What a severe little cousin," said Herbert, smiling. "You give poor sinners short shrift and a high gallows."

"Why, don't you think them devils, Cousin Herbert?"

"I think," said Herbert, stroking the child's golden hair caressingly, "that these particular devils may not be so black as the newspapers paint them. I hope that these reports may not be true."

I smiled approval at Herbert as I tucked up my hair; he had grown—so it seemed to me—into a broad-minded man, looking for good, and hoping to find it, in all.

"I believe in this last report," said Etienne, looking at Herbert, an expression of great kindliness in his long dark eyes, "though I dare say you'll wish to deny its truth."

So saying, he unfolded the newspaper and held it up so that we might see the two pictures on the open page, and above them in large type, these head-lines:

"BRAVE ACT OF UNKNOWN HERO."

The upper picture was but the photograph of a very handsome man; the one below showed a man lowering, by means of a long rope, a woman with a child in her arms from the fourth-story window of a burning building. The man was Herbert Fayne.

As I turned, in delight, from the pictured Herbert to congratulate the real one I was surprised by his expression of annoyance. As our eyes met he paled suddenly, and muttered something under his breath that sounded like an oath. Etienne smiled.

"I thought as much," he said, kindly, "but some have glory thrust upon them. You'll have to bear the burden of your bravery, Fayne. I wish you'd tell us about this experience; as an exhibition of strength, alone, it was remarkable."

"I suppose some infernal kodak fiend must have been among the crowd," grumbled Herbert, surveying the pictures with profound disgust. "Thank Heaven, they haven't got my name, anyway."

Then, unwillingly, and as briefly as possible, he told us of that night of horror. He had not been stopping in the doomed hotel or, indeed, in the town at all; but, waiting at the railway station for a train—the mere necessity of changing cars had kept him there for an hour—had heard the alarm of fire, and had gone with the crowd to the burning building. Of his untiring efforts to save life, of his carelessness of personal danger, of the many poor creatures who owed their escape from torture to him, he would say nothing. But he did not need to—the newspapers spoke for him.

"Did you shave off your mustache so that people might not find you out?" demanded Jane, her eyes big with excitement, as she stared solemnly at this wonderful cousin.

Herbert looked at the child oddly for a moment, almost as if he disliked her.

"Hardly, Janey," he said, at last; then, evidently anxious to change the subject, he told her to clasp my opal about my throat. "You might lose it," he added, "and it's worth more than most such gems."

"There aren't many of them," said Jane, as she obeyed him. "Lilian and I went to two big jewel shops in town and we saw only one Hungarian opal, and that wasn't a patch on Theo's. Lilian priced almost all the jewels in the shops—she said a friend had asked her to, such nonsense—and the man showed us Australian opals; they look like crushed rainbows, every color showing together; but the Hungarian—now, look at Theo's. Only one color, or perhaps two, at a time, a green light chasing a blue, or red, across the surface. Do you know," dropping her voice, and glancing around as though about to reveal a weighty secret, "I believe a fairy lives in each opal like Theo's, and peers out at the world through that strange milky veil. When the fairy loves the person to whom her opal belongs she feels just as the person does, and, quick as a flash, lights up colored lamps inside to suit her feelings; turns 'em up, turns 'em down, and sometimes, when her person is dreadfully unhappy, turns them—out."

"May Theo's fairy always feel gay," said Herbert, brightly. "Come, little Jane, let's carry her Lady's pearls back to the house." He picked up book and table-cover, and held out his hand for the pearls, but Etienne begged me to keep them on, and the bracelets.

"Then I'll carry you, Jane," said Herbert; "you are

Theo's biggest pearl, and her brightest diamond, aren't you?"

"Better say I'm her pigeon-blood ruby," said Jane, accepting his offer with gratitude. "Lilian priced one of them—there was only one—and the cost was awful. You must have loads of money, Etienne, for Lilian said Theo's ruby was way ahead of the one in the shop."

"Yes," said Etienne, looking at the newspaper he still held, "I have money, little Jane, and it does buy —rubies."

"And amusements," added Jane, waving her hand to us as Herbert walked off with her in his arms; "all sorts of amusements, too."

I had a cowardly desire to run after Herbert and Jane, but feeling that it would be rude to Etienne to leave him—he made no motion toward following the others—I sat still. He seemed in no haste to break the silence, although he evidently did not care to read the paper that he still held, mechanically, in his hand, but occupied himself by looking at me. Finally I grew too much embarrassed for comfort, and spoke myself:

"So you did not go to Hilltown, after all, Etienne?"

"No," he said, "I went back to my desk and made out a list of people I should like to have visit us, if you don't object. I have divided them into three sets—making three house-parties through the summer." He drew his chair up to my hammock and took from his breast-pocket a folded paper.

"I'm not quite sure we ought to entertain, Etienne," I said, timidly, not liking to cross him.

"Why not?" he asked, in surprise.

"Because—" I began, and stopped short.

"Because you are in mourning, Theo? Nonsense, brides are not expected to shut themselves up, and Lilian is too young to be dull. She has been pale and

out of sorts since she left town. Now, will you look at these lists?" There were three. "I've headed them Fast, Fine, and Firm."

I asked an explanation.

"Well," said Etienne, "I had to divide them in some way, and I thought that instead of mixing people up, as in ordinary social functions, we'd have those of congenial tastes together. By fast, I mean merely some of the gayest members of the, so-called, smart set—I want you to meet everybody in the swim, Theo—and these I have selected are either amusing or agreeable."

"Very gay people generally are agreeable, Etienne; they are so delightfully jolly."

"Too jolly, sometimes," he said, a trifle grimly, "but I'll see that your guests' spirits don't run away with them. The fine set are dull, only wanting society for the sake of showing their fine feathers; the firm—the firm, Theo, are like you, I think; well-born, well-behaved, but with an inborn love of gayety that carries them among the—gay."

He looked keenly at me; I looked across the river.

"You and your opal are blushing together, Theo," he said, softly. "Where is the great red rose I saw in your hair?"

"Where indeed?" I cried, seizing the first excuse to leave the hammock under the pretence of looking for my flower. The Chevalier jumping up, too, showed the wilted leaves of the rich red blossom strewn upon the grass where he had lain.

"Crumpled rose leaves don't mar your slumbers, wicked dog!" I cried, patting my favorite. "Etienne, I must run now and make myself presentable for luncheon."

He rose unwillingly, and we returned to the house. On the way he spoke admiringly of Herbert, of his splendid bravery. My answers were perfunctory and

cold, for an unworthy suspicion was creeping into my heart, that Herbert had, enjoying the excitement, but saved life as Braithes save lives—with the crowd applauding, and the delightful thrill that danger brings repaying him for every fresh effort. I was ashamed, very much ashamed, of my ungenerous thoughts, but banish them I could not, strive as I might.

XV

Although our invitations were sent out rather late, we received but few regrets. Two days before the Fourth of July the house was crowded with visitors. We began with those on Etienne's first list, headed "Fast."

Lilian had taken the news of the coming gayety dully; I was surprised by the little amount of interest shown. Herbert, on the contrary, was delighted. "Now I may hope to see something of you, Dora," he had said. Janey enjoyed the bustle and life the new arrivals brought to Braithe, but she soon began to worry about her friend Mr. Brace.

"He gives me an agitated stomach," she complained. "I'm growing attached to him, he's so really nice and not stuck on himself; and I'm so deadly afraid he'll say something to make these people laugh at him. Might I give him a hint, do you think, not to talk when they're 'round?"

"Don't fret, Jane," I said. "They are well-bred people; they won't laugh at him."

"Well-bred, Theo! What do you think of Mrs. Freddy Love? Cussing, yes, really cussing, my dear."

I had for the moment forgotten this gay young person, a pretty, tall girl, with big brown eyes, and a quantity of fair hair that she wore in a mop of short fluffiness, in order to increase her likeness to the fascinating Rosina Vokes; a resemblance of which she was very proud. Her language was strange—as Janey had remarked—and I sometimes thought, an affectation. Her husband, Freddy Love, found her amusing,

and was always encouraging her outbursts of profanity with peals of laughter.

We had as guests, besides this couple, Mrs. de Longue Allenby, a handsome woman with two pretty daughters; Mrs. Allenby's devoted attendant, Major O'Leary; Billy Bandhar, a tall, awkward, very dull, but rich, young man-about-town; Ralph Carrington, a handsome young Virginian; and a few others. A pleasant, lively set of people on the whole. I enjoyed their gayety.

June had been rainy, and Etienne, hearing that a beautiful waterfall in the neighborhood was, because of this, particularly well worth seeing, proposed a picnic on the Fourth. We were to eat our luncheon near the waterfall, and return home early enough to escape the usual late afternoon Fourth of July thunder-storm. The morning was fine but hot, and the women of the party appeared in their most filmy muslins, the men in white duck and thin flannels. At the last moment, when the parties in the different wagons had been arranged to everybody's satisfaction, Mrs. Love jumped from her seat beside Herbert, and, running up to me, begged me to exchange with her.

"I want to sit beside Rappelle; I love to drive four-in-hand," she said, shaking her mop of fair curls and smiling. "But I'm not goin' to do the flirtation act, not a damn flirt; so you needn't be scared. Honor among thieves you know, Mrs. R.!" And amid laughter, and cries of "Do as you would be done by! Do you catch on, Freddy, my boy?" and much nonsense, I did as she wished, and we started.

Herbert drove a double dog-cart. In the back seat were Lilian (charmingly pretty in her white frock and big black hat) and Ralph Carrington. That he was deeply smitten by the fair beauty of his companion was very evident, and her pleasure in his society was shown by the soft pink flush in her usually pale cheeks.

I liked the young Virginian, his frank, gay manner and handsome dark face. I fear I am something of a match-maker, for as I looked at the two I thought what a handsome couple they would make.

"A penny for your thoughts, Theo!" said Herbert, who was driving very slowly, because of the heat, he insisted. I could not earn the penny, my thoughts being unrevealable.

"What a nice little woman Nelly Love is, Theo," was his next remark.

"I wonder you think so, when she left you for Etienne."

"My suggestion, my dear child."

"Your suggestion, Bertie? What do you mean?"

"Simply that she bores me and you—don't."

"Why do you blow hot and cold, Bertie, and talk nonsense that doesn't deceive me? One minute you pretend you like her, the next—not. Please don't be such a goose; and drive faster, or I'll take the reins myself, and probably upset you," and I laughed.

"You've done that already, Dolly," he said, under his breath, as he whipped up the horses. I laughed again.

"Poor Bertie!" I said; "balked of his flirtation with gay Mrs. Love, and forced to keep his hand in with his country cousin. There, don't beat the poor horses. Because I don't want to crawl, that doesn't mean I want to run away."

"I wish you did," he grumbled. I stared at him. He was really out of humor. Sorry that he had felt Mrs. Love's desertion as a snub, before so many people, too, I laid my hand gently upon his arm, and tried to soothe his wounded vanity.

"Don't be cross with me, Bertie," I whispered. "I like to see my handsome cousin always sunshiny. I'll manage so that you shall drive home the prettiest girl of the lot. Choose—shall it be Elsie Allenby?"

"Japanese girl in a tea-garden," was the sharp answer.

"Well, Mabel then."

"Pretty viper, lifting her small head to strike."

"Perhaps the mother might suit you better, Bertie. She is handsome, and a widow."

"A widow, Theo? Yes, through the divorce court."

"What!" I exclaimed; "a *divorcée*? O Herbert!"

"May we hear the cause of your excitement, Theo, dear?" asked Lilian, leaning forward from the back seat.

"Theo didn't know Mrs. de Longue Allenby had slipped the noose matrimonial, that's all," explained Herbert, "and your sister, being a good Episcopalian, is properly shocked."

"Then you don't believe in divorce, Mrs. Rappelle?" said young Carrington, eagerly, leaning forward in his turn.

"No," I said, shortly. "If Mr. Allenby was cruel, and wicked, of course his wife ought to have been separated from him; but divorced—never!"

"He wasn't cruel," drawled Herbert, "or wicked. She happened to prefer O'Leary—that was all. The joke of it is that now she's got rid of Allenby, O'Leary can't marry her."

"Why not?" asked Lilian.

"Because his wife won't let him. He can't divorce her—and she won't divorce him," said Herbert, laughing.

"Is she so fond of him, Bertie?" I could not understant the wife's affection.

"No, my foolish cousin, not fond—but furious. She pays him out that way."

"I call it disgusting, the way married people change partners now, as if marriage were a dance," said Mr. Carrington, hotly. "It ought to be put a stop to."

"Wait till you fall in love, old fellow," said Herbert, smiling, "then you'll change your tune."

"I hope I may fall in love without poaching on other men's preserves," was the answer. "I'd sooner hang myself than marry a *divorcée*."

"Fine speeches!" sneered Herbert. "Wait till the lightning strikes. When your turn comes you'll do as others have done—get the woman you love, by hook or by crook."

"Mr. Carrington may say," I said, quickly, "as some already have:

> **"I could not love thee, dear, so much,**
> **Loved I not honor more."**

"Thank you, Mrs. Rappelle," cried Carrington. "It is very pleasant to be understood. And you," dropping his voice and turning to Lilian, "you agree with your sister, I feel sure."

Lilian had lost her pretty color; pale, with eyes cast down, she sat motionless, as if not interested in the conversation.

"Do you agree with Theo, and with Carrington, Lilian?" asked Herbert, suddenly turning in his seat, and looking searchingly at her.

"I don't know," she said, very gently; "I hate finding fault with the poor naughty people. It is so hard to be a saint—so easy to be a sinner. Let us all pray that we may never be tempted."

As Herbert readjusted himself our eyes met. A derisive gleam shot from his. "Does the goody-goody trick neatly, doesn't she, Dolly? Simple Simon is gulled no end."

"Hush, Bertie!"

"O my Theo, noble-hearted! There, I won't say another word. This is the gate we turn in, isn't it? I remember it from the time we came here together

as children," and he began to sing "Auld Lang Syne."

The horses broke into a swift trot, and in a few moments we had entered the little wood, where the others of the party were already assembled. Etienne, coming quickly forward, lifted me from the wagon. He looked rather grave.

"You are late," he said.

"You mustn't scold Theo, Etienne," said Lilian, sweetly. "She and Bertie began on their reminiscences and forgot about time. I hadn't the heart to remind them—it was my fault."

That she was paying me out, as she would have said, for something I had done—or left undone—was evident; but for what, rack my brains as I might, I could not imagine.

"We are to lunch under those trees," said Etienne, nodding toward the chosen spot, "and walk to see the cascade later."

"Yes," chimed in Mrs. Love, coming up, "such an infernal noise when you're near it, you can't hear yourself burble. Bracy-pacy and I galloped up there just now—my hind-legs ache yet, we trotted along so hard. Say, Mrs. Theo, may I peel the hard-boilers? You owe me a good turn, you know"—in a whisper; then, raising her voice again, "I've never had a big enough go at 'em in my life."

"Hard-boilers?" I questioned.

"Yes, child, yes—hard-boiled eggs. I love to peel the shells off; may I?"

"We have a throne for the queen of the fête," said Monsieur Randoce, in French, as he joined us. "Behold then!" pointing toward a pile of cushions, heaped at the foot of a great tree. "And a crown of ferns and roses—for the most beautiful!" He bowed low as he finished his little speech.

"Oh, you absurd old Parlez-Vous!" cried Mrs. Love,

with her gay laugh. "Can't you trot it out in plain American? Or don't you want me to understand?" and she ran away.

The Frenchman smiled deprecatingly, and spread out his hands. "A good heart, doubtless—but!" he ended with a shrug of the shoulders. His black mustache hung a-droop, signifying that Monsieur Randoce was melancholy, and I knew that he felt aggrieved because Herbert had been my Jehu. Anxious that all should enjoy the day, I hastened to admire his arrangement of the cushions, and taking off my hat, submitted to being crowned with his pretty wreath. This cheered him, and he straightway curled his mustache gayly upward—his spirits having grown high.

All had voted for an old-fashioned picnic; the cloth to be spread on the grass, and everything, save the ices, to be put on it at once. It had been suggested that we should wait upon each other, but this Etienne had vetoed, saying too much spilling would be the result.

"I told that prime old hen, my pearl of a Merle, to lay no end of eggs," said Mrs. Love, surveying the feast. "Heavens, what a pile! Here, you Brace, come sit beside me and feed me, while I work for the crowd. I'll pin on your bib."

So saying, she pushed Mr. Brace—to my surprise nowise unwilling—down upon the cushions beside her, and pinned a napkin firmly around his neck.

"Isn't he too cunning for anything!" she said, contemplating, with great complacency, the innocent face of little Mr. Brace, blushing pinkly above his napkin. "He's so infernally pious he's bound to keep me straight, aren't you, Bracy? Don't he look like the dearest, puffiest little cherub you ever saw? He ought to have wings! Give me some white paper, somebody, quick."

Hervey, amused, though disapproving, found some;

and straightway Mr. Brace had a pair of ragged wings hanging down his back.

"Floppy, of course, ladies and gentlemen," cried Mrs. Love, with the air of a showman, "because his spirits are low; wait till he gets some champagne aboard—" winking at me, "then you'll see these wings rise up and flutter! I'll pin him to my hat then, like a beautiful butterfly, to keep him steady. Now then, a bite of that sandwich, please, and I'll to work." She drew the dish of eggs toward her and began to shell them with great energy, Mr. Brace feeding her with whatever she demanded.

Mrs. Love was very well born, and because of her blue blood her vagaries of speech and behavior were tolerated. "It's only Nelly's way," her friends said. Mrs. Allenby, gentle, dignified, with a charming serenity of manner, looked on with amiable amusement as Mrs. Love diverted herself. I wished Herbert had not told me of Mrs. Allenby's divorce. I wondered if there might not be extenuating circumstances. She was so very attractive. Then I saw Major O'Leary attending to her wants with an air of accustomed devotion, and looked away with a sensation of disgust. As I did so I caught Etienne's eye; he smiled kindly at me across the table-cloth. I wondered of what he was thinking.

"I had a letter all about you yesterday, Mrs. Rappelle," said Miss Mabel Allenby, during a lull in the conversation. "It was from Bella Acton; do you remember her?"

"Yes indeed, very well. She was so pretty—where is she now?"

"And her brother, James Acton, do you remember him, too?"

"Yes."

"She says you jilted him, Mrs. Rappelle, because he was poor—but of course I don't believe that one

bit. It was a cross, horrid letter, dear Mrs. Rappelle," with a sweet, sad little smile, "and I am most angry with Bella. The idea of saying you were engaged to two men at once! To her brother, and to some other horrid man. It's really too bad of her, and I shall tell her so." Miss Allenby pouted, and looked gracefully severe.

"Makes you out a regular Mormon, doesn't she, Mrs. Rappelle?" cried Nelly Love, still busy with the eggs, though the salad had been reached. "Awfully nice of you to repeat what Bella Act-like-the-Devil wrote, Mabel, it interests us all so much. Talking of Mormons, do you suppose a man can be in love with a dozen wives at a time? What do you think, Bracy?"

"I don't see why not," said Mr. Brace, gently, staring patiently around at us all through his eye-glasses. "Of course Mormonism is a dreadful sin, but when it comes to loving—why, if a man has six or seven children he can love them all dearly, so why not six or seven wives?"

The dead silence, that had lasted during this remarkable speech, was ended in a storm of laughter and wild applause. The men roared and shouted as if they would never have done, and the women giggled delightedly.

"Listen to the little parson," yelled the men. "Hear him interpret the Law and the Prophets!"

Poor Mr. Brace was scarlet with confusion, and Janey's misery was painful to witness. The child's eyes were full of tears.

"Talking of jilting," said Billy Bandhar, solemnly, as the tempest of mirth subsided, "talking of jilting, I say, I hope Folsom Figgers will come to his senses, and jilt the girl he's been fool enough to engage himself to, before she marries him."

Mr. Bandhar was eating lobster salad and raspberry jam, in alternate bites; he said the combination

was new and delightful. He crouched cross-legged on a mat, a huge plate of the salad just in front of him, the jam-pot beside it. This was his first effort at conversation—heretofore he had been absorbed in absorbing.

"What's the matter with his girl?" asked Freddy Love.

"Poor," said Mr. Bandhar, still more solemnly, "very poor! If," he continued, poising a large mass of salad on his fork, preparatory to stuffing it into his mouth, "if I were, in a moment of insanity, to offer to marry a poor girl, I hope I should fall dead on the way to the altar."

"Oh, you coward!" cried Mrs. Love, picking up an olive from a dish beside her, and throwing it at him with great force, and an appalling accuracy of aim. "You'd flinch, would you?"—another olive. "Why, what girl would be damn-fool enough to want to run in double harness with you?"

"Stop her, Freddy!" yelled the wretched Bandhar, scrambling to his feet, and overturning salad plate and jam-pot, "she's ruinin' my clothes. Speak to her, can't you?"

But Freddy, limp with laughter, only cried, "Go it, Nell, go it!"

Mrs. Love, jumping up in her turn, seized the dish of olives and—using them as a child would snowballs—pursued her victim; who, entreating and expostulating by turns, dodged her as best he might among the trees. The men encouraged Nelly with applause and delighted yells of approval. As for me, I leaned my head back against my tree-trunk and laughed till I cried; Mr. Bandhar's terror was so ridiculously real.

Etienne, at last, taking pity upon the forlorn man, called the crowd to order, and Mr. Bandhar was soothed, and comforted with champagne.

"You are a Southerner, Mr. Fayne, ees eet not so?" asked Monsieur Randoce, good-naturedly trying to divert people's attention from Bandhar, who was on the verge of tears.

"No such luck," said Herbert, smiling. "When I'm North I only wish I were."

"Why?" asked Mabel Allenby, curiously.

"Because then I'd be everybody's darling. Look at Carrington, that F. F. V.—don't you all dote on him? He is picturesque, don't you see, with a Lost Cause, and a romantic background of slaves. I'm nothing but a poor Yankee, quite out of the fashion. The Southerners have the soft snap up here nowadays. The only way I'm in the swim at all is because I'm cousin to the Braithes," and he smiled at me.

"A near cousin?" questioned Mabel, still more curiously.

"In every sense of the word—yes," was the quiet answer.

Miss Allenby laughed disagreeably.

"Let us go and look at the waterfall," I said, rising. I was displeased with Herbert. What did he mean by talking so foolishly, by his sentimental glances and meaning smiles? An outsider might have supposed from his manner that he and I had been lovers in the past, instead of a pair of constantly squabbling children. There was such a thing as carrying a joke too far, if he intended one. I felt I must give him a talking to. He joined me as I strolled, with the others, up the wooded hill. Janey was on his shoulder.

"Bertie is carrying me because I'm a-weary, yes, body and soul," said poor little Jane.

"Carefully, Bert," I said, forgetting his misdeeds in my fear lest he let the child fall. "Moss and pine-needles are slippery."

"He's strong," said Jane. "I'm not sure his heart isn't crooked, but his back and legs are all right."

"Ungrateful child!" said Herbert. "And I your slave!"

"Every girl's slave, I guess," said Jane. "Lilian says you're an awful flirt, and never say what you mean."

"Don't believe her, Theo," said Herbert, quickly. "Lilian sees us all through blue glasses."

"Here's Etienne!" cried Janey. "Etienne, come here; I want you to carry me back, then Theo won't worry, and I want—" She whispered the rest, as she left Herbert's arms for Etienne's.

"That must be as Theo wishes," said Etienne, looking at me steadily. "She may have arranged otherwise."

"Come here, Theo," commanded my small mistress; and, as I obeyed, she put one arm around my neck, and drew my face close to hers and Etienne's. "I want us three to drive home together—just us three. I'm tired to death of the strangers within our gates, yes, tired! I 'most wish I could hear their teeth gnashing in outer darkness, I'm so disgusted with their ways—making me laugh, and you, too, Theo, when 'twas rude. Here, take that off!" She lifted the wreath from my hair, and dropped it into the swiftly flowing brook beside us. "Will you come with Etienne and me, Theo?"

"Yes, Janey."

"You wish to, Theo?" asked Etienne, his lips almost touching my cheek.

"Yes," I said, blushing hotly.

"Then let's be off," said Jane, "and I'll try to forget and forgive." I stared at her. "Don't be a goose, Theo—Brace, of course. I was growing so attached—but there, never mind; he's young. I'll try to hope he'll learn better in time."

I, too, had been pained by Mr. Brace's foolish speech, and could not but regret the boyish readiness

with which he yielded to the fascination Mrs. Love's wild spirits evidently possessed for him. He was unable, owing to a call from one of his poor people, to remain at the house that evening; and, although at first I was sorry to have him lose the fine display of fireworks, I was, later, glad of his absence.

This was when, at our midnight supper, Mrs. Love suddenly mounted the table, and, calling upon Hervey to remove the candles lest they set fire to her gauzy skirts, offered to dance for our amusement.

"Now then, boys and girls," she cried, gayly, shaking her mop of curls, and smiling down upon us, "I'll finish up this celebratin' of the glorious Fourth by giving you a new, and truly original specimen, of the terpsichorean art. I'll give you a Fourth of July quickstep first, and, as encore, the Braithe House fling!"

As she caught her skirts in both hands preparatory to beginning, I, almost unconsciously, rose, casting at the same time an imploring glance at Etienne. He returned it as if understanding, but the next moment himself stepped up on the table, and, picking his way among the glasses and flowers, joined Mrs. Love. I felt oddly faint, sick at heart; what was coming?

Mrs. Love welcomed him joyfully. "Bully for you, Rappelle!" she cried, holding out a hand to him. "You're the boy for my money! Shall we do a cake-walk for the crowd?"

Shouts of approval and encouragement arose on all sides. Billy Bandhar was almost beside himself with delight; Major O'Leary leered up at Nelly Love in a state of rapture that was repulsive.

Etienne disregarded her motion of welcome:

"Carrington," he said, sharply, "lend a hand, will you?" And before Mrs. Love realized his intention he had lifted her down to Mr. Carrington, who had sprung to help him.

"Go upstairs with Theo," Etienne commanded, good-naturedly, as though speaking to a wayward child. "You've been up too late as it is——"

"Yes," interrupted Freddy Love, holding his sides with laughter, "too late—and too high!"

To my surprise Mrs. Love went with me willingly. "I'm sorry I've been troublesome, Mrs. Theo," she said, as we reached her room, "for I've taken an awful fancy to you. Are you very angry? No, I see you've forgiven me already. There, kiss me good-night, and I'll go to bed and dream about a rose—a rose without thorns—you."

And I, I fell to wondering why Etienne had cared to test me, by surrounding me with the gayest of his gay acquaintances? For that I was being tested, I no longer doubted. But I marvelled at his imagining that I could be influenced in any way by our present guests.

XVI

Early Sunday afternoon Janey and I slipped away to the chapel, for a quiet hour together. I was glad to be alone with my little sister, and to be free from Herbert's society for a time. Since the picnic he had continued to devote himself to me, still behaving as though there had been a past of love-making between us. Saucy Mrs. Love had amused herself, the evening before, by pressing a rose to my lips and then flinging it upon the grass, inviting Herbert and Monsieur Randoce to scramble for it. This they had done, more like two school-boys than grown men, losing their tempers and fighting so fiercely that I had to promise a fresh rose to Herbert to induce him to behave. For Etienne was approaching and I could not let the fight go on.

Later, when gay Mrs. Ainslie—Mr. Carrington's cousin—made a pretty, foolish speech, about my being unselfish, Herbert had cried out that unselfishness was a vice when carried too far, adding:

"My cousin immolates herself that those she loves may flourish. Self-sacrifice is sickening to an onlooker!"

Never had I known his love of teasing so insatiable, and I trembled every time he opened his lips, not knowing what he might say next.

Janey made me sit on Old Vivian's tombstone, and flinging herself down on the grass before me, leaned her golden head against my knee.

"Look at the river and mountains, Theo," she said; "aren't they drowsy? They're taking their afternoon naps, like the people at the house. It's heavenly here, all alone with you and sleepy old Charles Stuart. I

do hope I mayn't have to go to a promiscuous heaven; I should hate it so. I can't forgive people's sins when they're near me, somehow——"

"May I join you?" said Mr. Brace, strolling up.

"Yes," said Janey, with a heavy sigh, "oh, yes!" Then, in warmer tones, "Perhaps you feel sleepy, like the Chevalier, Mr. Brace. Lie right down beside me, so," as he obeyed. "Put your head on that piece of Theo's gown—it won't pull on her, there's such a lot of it on the grass. Now, do go by-low; we shan't mind at all. Theo, don't you speak, and he'll be off in a minute."

Willing to humor her, and seeing through her transparent device, to lock Mr. Brace out of our party with chains of slumber, I kept silence.

"Boh!" cried a voice behind us, suddenly, and a shower of rose leaves fell into my lap.

"Naughty girl, robbing my rose-garden!" I said, and smiled up into Mrs. Love's mischievous face; for she it was, and she alone.

"Bracy-pacy—as I'm a living sinner!" she exclaimed. "I made cocksure it was you and your everlasting cousin, spooning; and crept up as softly, to give you a sickening scare. Man's legs, and a yellow head against your knee; I was so sure I had you! Heavens, what a joke against me!" and she laughed.

"Theo makes allowances for everybody," said Jane, who had risen and now stood facing Mrs. Love, her cheeks crimson, her eyes flashing; "yes, even for you, you wicked thing, but I shan't!"

"Good Lord, Janey!" ejaculated the startled Mrs. Love.

"Don't cuss at me," cried the child furiously, stamping her tiny foot, "for I shan't permit it! You talk in that horrid way because it makes your silly husband laugh, and gives you a chance to say what you really think as if 'twas only a joke—and it's

mean; yes, mean! And my Theo is not in love with Herbert Fayne, though you like to pretend so; and it's not nice of you, but very, very nasty. He only came here a few weeks ago, and she hadn't seen him before since she was thirteen, though that Miss Mabel Allenby does say it's an old affair. Yes, Theo, I heard her say so, and that you'd been engaged on and off to him, 'played fast and loose' she said—as if you were a wicked cat—for years; and I told her she lied, only politely, Theo. I just said, 'Miss Allenby, you are telling the wickedest falsehood I ever heard,' but she didn't want to believe me. Mrs. Love, my sister Theo may have flirted once, but she thinks frisky matrons are vulgar, and— O Theo, I wish you'd make her go away!" and flinging herself into my arms, the child burst into tears.

"Isn't she splendid?" said Mrs. Love, softly. "Isn't she grand! Janey, Janey, forgive me," falling on her knees beside little Jane. "I love your Theo dearly, yes, dearly, and I was only talking nonsense, child. Mrs. Theo's an angel. See, I'm down upon my knees!"

Janey, in nowise placated, put out her hand and thrust Mrs. Love away.

"Now you're making fun of her," she sobbed, "and that's your hateful way of getting out of it. You said you thought that Mr. Brace's nice, good legs were Herbert's; you did, you did, and took my head for his —against Theo's knee, too!"

"I did," said Mrs. Love, soberly, "and I'm ashamed of myself, Jane. Mr. Rappelle will be here directly, so if you don't want him to shy off the bank with horror, you'd better dry your eyes."

"If he was coming, why did you come?" persisted the irate Jane, but she dried her eyes. "He loves Theo a great deal better than you do, and knows her nice ways. He knows she'd never do anything to displease me and him."

"Don't you like your cousin Herbert, child?" asked Mrs. Love.

Janey colored. "I don't when he isn't 'round," she said, shamefacedly, "but when he is, I do."

"I came out here to do a kind thing," said Mrs. Love, looking meaningly at me, "and to make myself agreeable——"

"Agreeable," said Jane, interrupting her, "agreeable! If you went to the Cannibal Islands and the cannibals offered you a piece of cooked infant, should you think them agreeable?"

"But they would mean to be," I broke in, seeing my chance of reconciling the two. "They would be offering their choicest viand to a needy traveller. Mrs. Love has intended to please me——"

"I understand," said Mrs. Love. "I've been a fool. Next time I'll trust to my instinct, and not swallow a jealous girl's infernal gossip."

"Jealous?" I questioned, in surprise, and then became aware that Etienne was close behind me.

"Who is jealous?" he asked, looking keenly about as if in search of someone.

"Not you, you lucky dog," said Mrs. Love, briskly, "nor my Freddy, because neither one of you has the chance. Hush, here comes Bracey-pacey"—Mr. Brace had fled from the storm. "Don't let him suspect my heart's not his!"

Mr. Brace, with many blushes, now came to say that he had been sent for, to administer the last sacrament to the wife of a laborer, in the brick-yard down the river.

"She isn't really dying, I think," he said, gently, "but if she imagines so, she is in need of aid, poor soul. About evening service, Mrs. Rappelle, I doubt if I can get back in time——"

I begged him not to think of returning, and he went away. The rest of us sat and chatted till it was

time for afternoon tea, which was to be served in the rose garden, grown my favorite haunt.

As we were returning homeward through the thick belt of woodland that lay between flower garden and chapel—slowly, because of the charm of its dense shade and sweet woodsy odors—we met Mrs. Allenby, accompanied by Herbert Fayne. She was talking earnestly, while he lent an attentive ear.

"Here's a state of things!" whispered Mrs. Love, winking at me; "O'Leary had better watch out."

"I never saw you coming at all," said Mrs. Allenby, "I was so busy talking to your cousin, Mrs. Rappelle."

"Awfully interesting topic," said Herbert, carefully stifling a huge yawn, and looking woe-begone with boredom. "Mrs. Allenby has been telling me about her jewels, Dolly."

As he used this old pet name for me I glanced quickly at Etienne, but he was looking at Mrs. Allenby, and apparently did not hear, or care. Mrs. Love pinched my arm, murmuring, "What sand!"

"The worst of owning jewels is," said Mrs. Allenby, lowering her voice and glancing searchingly around to see that no eavesdropper loitered near, "the worst of having valuable jewels, I mean, is to know where to keep them.

"Monsieur Randoce must keep what he holds most dear in his breast-pocket," said Herbert. "He slaps it, every now and then, to make sure it's there."

"Which side?" asked Mrs. Love, eagerly.

"Heart side," was the answer; "so it's probably a love-token."

"A love-token!" exclaimed Mrs. Love, and fell into a reverie.

"Weary little cousin!" said Herbert, gently, stooping to look into Janey's face. "The afternoon is hot, and walking tiresome to little people; let me pick you

up—there!" and he lifted her carefully in his strong arms, and carried her lightly and easily along.

"I oughtn't to let you, Herbert," said the child, looking worried, "because I'm not really grateful, I'm afraid."

"I don't want gratitude," said Herbert, with one of his sunny smiles; "I want Janey to be comfortable."

My heart melted. I forgave him his nonsense of the night before. "You are very good to her, Bertie," I said, softly.

He looked at me steadily across Jane's shoulder. I failed to understand the expression in his heavy-lidded eyes. The next moment Mr. Carrington hailed us from the entrance to the rose garden, asking where we had been.

"To sit on the gravestones near the chapel," explained Jane, from her high perch in Herbert's arms. "But we didn't get to my mother's grave, because people came, and we knew she wouldn't like it." Then, lowering her voice, "She likes just Theo and me to come and sit by her, just we two. You see," confidentially, "she isn't in any coffin. Theo promised to bury her without one, and Theo always keeps her word. No, Theo wrapped her in her own long cloak, and over that she draped our country's flag—the noblest covering, don't you think? I do. I remember the day so well," looking dreamily into the distance. "It had been bitter cold, but that day was warmer. Theo got down into the grave herself, and made my little Mummy a bed of fir branches and laid her on it. No one but Theo would have done it, Etienne says."

"For once I agree with him," murmured Herbert, aside to me.

"You see," continued Lydia's little daughter, "my mother loved Theo better even than she did me, and she wanted to have everything easy, so that she could

get up and haunt any person who might try to hurt her. My mother wasn't very strong, and screwed-down coffin lids are hard to open."

"Janey, dear child!" remonstrated Mr. Carrington.

"Then, she expected really to stay and sleep near the chapel," not heeding him, "but at last she changed her mind, and went to heaven in Theo's arms."

"A heaven indeed!" said Herbert, under his breath.

"Janey," said Mr. Carrington, frightened by the child's expression, "don't you like ice-cream? Merle is bringing out a big freezer full!"

"Ice-cream! Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed Jane. "Come, Herbert, come, Theo. Why, look at Mrs. Love! What's she up to now?"

All the members of the house-party had assembled under the big trees of the rose garden, and were lounging in basket-chairs and hammocks or wandering to and fro, chatting with the different groups. At the moment that we arrived at the opening in the hedge, Mrs. Love led Monsieur Randoce into the centre of the circle of people, and calling out loudly that she was about to show a newly learned trick in magic, asked Mabel Allenby to be her assistant.

"You weel not hurt me, no?" said Monsieur Randoce, smiling, and not averse to being the object of everyone's attention.

"No," was the answer, "but I've learned how to tell what a man's thinking of all the time, if he'll let me put him through certain paces."

Monsieur Randoce looked, as if involuntarily, at me. Herbert muttered something I could not catch.

"Set me down, please, Herbert," said Janey; "you squeeze me too tight," and, gaining her footing, she slipped her hand into mine.

Monsieur Randoce was now told to tilt his head backward, and look upward through the branches of the trees, and, at the same time, to thrust his arms stiffly behind him. He obeyed, and Mabel Allenby, taking his hands in hers, held them tightly.

"Now count ten as loud as you can, in French," commanded Mrs. Love.

"Un, deux, trois——" He broke off with an exclamation of dismay, for Mrs. Love, slipping her hand into his breast-pocket, had deftly removed something with which she quickly ran away.

Her victim made no effort to pursue her and recover his lost treasure; pale, bewildered, he stood quite still, his hands pressed close against the emptied pocket, and stared beseechingly at me. Bertie, on the contrary, light-footed as a deer, was already close upon Mrs. Love, who had stopped to examine her booty, and, to my very great surprise, Etienne had followed her as swiftly, and arrived beside the volatile young woman as soon as he. She had doubled through the trees—imagining one of her pursuers to be Monsieur Randoce—toward the hedge near which Jane and I were standing, with Mr. Carrington, and when she paused in her flight she was very close to us. As she glanced at what she held in her hand she uttered a cry of real dismay, and cast a frightened glance at me. Etienne and Herbert, coming up together, looked over her shoulder, and saw what she had. Both men instantly snatched at it, but Etienne's fingers closed over it first. Herbert, coloring fiercely, tried to wrest it from him; but Etienne, his face set like iron, said something in a low tone, and Herbert, turning abruptly, stood aside.

Mrs. Love ran to me, her face colorless, her eyes bright with tears. "O Theo!" she gasped, "I had no idea——"

"Control yourself," said Herbert, sharply, coming

after her. "You've done harm enough as it is, Heaven knows. Damn the French thief!"

"Hush!" I said; for Etienne, standing close by Monsieur Randoce, had begun to speak, in clear, far-reaching tones.

"Don't take it so hard, Randoce," he said, an odd smile about his thin lips. "Mrs. Love has only anticipated you by a few moments. Monsieur Randoce," turning to the others, "had hoped to show you, this afternoon, one of the very best things he has ever done, celebrated artist that he justly is—a miniature of my wife. I begged him to paint it for me some weeks ago. I consider it perfect—even that unimportant trifle, the frame, shows an artist's taste."

Everyone began to examine and admire, while Monsieur Randoce stood like one who dreams, scarce seeming to hear the congratulations that poured in upon him. I moved, with Mrs. Love, who still looked white and frightened, to a rustic sofa and sat down, feeling unable to stand. I was as terrified as she, for Miss Allenby had just admired, in staccato tones, a true-lover's knot which surmounted the frame. What might not Etienne be thinking, and were our guests deceived by his ready wit?

"Look not upon the wine when it is red," murmured Hervey, placing a cup and saucer in my trembling fingers, "but sherry looks like tea, and drink it quickly, dear lady. Gather your roses while it's May, of course, but in July a cloud no bigger than a man's fist can do damage. Those who play with edged tools," a side-glance of deep reproach at Mrs. Love, "cut their neighbor's fingers badly sometimes. A word to the wisely willing is sufficient, but how to knock sense into a witless foreigner beats me!"

The next moment he was offering Monsieur Randoce champagne, and saying something to him in a low tone. What it was I never heard, but it acted upon

the dazed Frenchman like an electric shock, and he instantly began to behave as he should, saying what was necessary to his admirers.

Etienne did not approach me, nor look at me, and when I entered the drawing-room before dinner and found him there, seated in a huge armchair, apparently buried in thought, he merely rose to offer it me; and when, declining it, I took a chair by the window, he sank back into both place and reverie, seeming to forget my presence.

Herbert, entering a moment after, failed to see him, and coming quickly to me, said:

"My rose, Dolly, the one you promised me if I would be good. May I have it now?"

"Yes," I said, "the garden is full—help yourself."

"Dora!" he exclaimed, a world of tender reproach in his voice.

"That in your hair may please Mr. Fayne, my dear," said Etienne, rising suddenly and coming close to me.

Herbert started, in spite of his habitual self-control, showing but too plainly his ignorance of Etienne's near neighborhood.

"My fingers are clumsy," said Etienne, stooping over me and gently unfastening the flower from my hair, "but Theo is accustomed to them. There," placing the rose in my hand, "put that in Mr. Fayne's buttonhole."

I obeyed silently. Herbert's face was colorless; I knew he was in a passion of rage.

"She needs no ornament, does she, Fayne?" Etienne went on, putting his hand under my chin and tilting my face up as though to look deep into my eyes. "She turns all our heads with what nature has given her," and leaning down he kissed my cheek. "Don't blush so furiously, Theo! There's no one here save your cousin; surely you don't mind him?"

But my cousin had hurried away. Etienne's face changed; it was no longer smiling, but sombre.

"Stop in the library, please, on your way upstairs to-night," he said, sternly; and, our guests entering, my *mauvais quart d'heure* was over—and I had to prepare for a worse to come.

I had dressed so carefully for dinner, hoping by looking my best to soften Etienne's hard thoughts of me. I glanced ruefully down at my exquisite *crêpe de chine;* the pretty white frock, the long string of pearls, the creamy rose in my hair, had been worn in vain. The rose had gone—and with it my hope of escaping my husband's displeasure.

But I pleased some among my guests more than ever before. To Mrs. Allenby, the flirtatious Mrs. Ainslie, Major O'Leary, and several others, I had evidently become an object of much interest. The two women gave me sympathetic glances. I felt I hated them. Mrs. Love, on the contrary, drooped like a dispirited bird, and was so miserable over the result of her prank, that had I not already forgiven her, I must have done so then.

I smiled upon all—graciously, impartially. I made a point of saying something pleasant to each one; not excepting Monsieur Randoce, who, sombre and hilarious by turns, showed but too plainly the irritated condition of his nerves. And all the time, while laughing, jesting, I was thinking of the coming interview in the library. What would Etienne say? I knew that Monsieur Randoce, too, was thinking of Etienne; I saw him stealthily watching his calm face—a face that rarely betrayed its owner's thoughts.

But though in doubt as to what punishment was to be mine, I knew quite well what would happen in regard to the French artist. Etienne would listen to no explanation—did Monsieur Randoce seek to offer any—but, having said that the miniature had been

ordered for himself, would oblige Monsieur Randoce to accept, not only this statement, but also payment in full for his work. Of this I felt sure.

I was as proud of Etienne as I was ashamed of myself. Why had I yielded to my wicked fondness for making everybody satisfied with themselves, their surroundings—and with me? Why had I smiled, and pretended not to understand foolish speeches, flirtatious glances, when I ought to have frowned, and administered rebuke? Ah, why indeed! For failing to take Herbert's nonsense seriously I could not blame myself, yet how had it been interpreted? Truly for the feet of a daughter of the Braithes the path of matrimony was hard. How might Lilian behave should she ever marry? Then, cutting short my musings, I signaled to Mrs. Allenby, at Etienne's right hand, and retreated with my flock of doves to the great stone portico outside the drawing-room windows.

The night was very lovely, the river flooded with moonlight. The little waves rippled southward, showing that the tide was on the ebb, flowing gently, so gently to the sea. When the men joined us there was music to please those whose minds were attuned to pleasure. I seated myself far from corners shadowy or remote, fearing that Monsieur Randoce, or Herbert, might desire to indulge in sentimental discourse. I was unhappy, and in no mood for conversation of any kind; most certainly not for the fencing sort that would be necessary with Monsieur Randoce, nor for the exchange of angry incivilities that must inevitably result from any intimate talk with Herbert. I found the long evening dull, yet it slipped away all too quickly for me, and I crossed the hall very, very slowly, when I went to keep my appointment with Etienne.

The library was but dimly lighted; Old Vivian, seen across its dusky vastness, seemed as if starting from his frame. His blue eyes looked into mine with an ex-

pression of sneering contempt. Herbert resembled him far too closely. I wished that Lydia had not believed so firmly that those who are alike in feature are alike in heart, mind, and soul. Surely Herbert was merely foolish, not wicked; surely in him the Braithe vices had softened into trivial faults! Where Old Vivian would have meant serious mischief, surely Herbert but intended to tease.

I sank into a chair, feeling so very weary, so out of patience, with Monsieur Randoce, with Herbert—with myself. When Etienne entered, and closed both doors behind him, I had reached the state of not caring very much what he might say or do, yet his first words caused an instant revulsion of feeling.

"I asked you to stop in here on your way upstairs, Theo," he said, and he did not sit down, "as I think it would be well for you to make your rounds to-night. We have had such warm weather that the walls must be heated through. I will go with you. It will take but a few moments, and, after, there will be time to speak—of other matters."

For a moment I failed to understand him, then I remembered the foolish old custom of the House to which he alluded, and crimsoned with indignation. It had always been considered the duty of the Head of the Family to examine, once a year, the By-Ways of Braithe, in order to see whether their secrets had been discovered, and if the hidden springs and locks were in good condition—in short, to make sure that all was in readiness in case of need. I had never known just when my father performed this absurd rite, but we all could make a pretty shrewd guess as to when he was contemplating it, because of the particularly evil state of his temper at that time. It had not entered my mind that anyone could possibly think it necessary for me to keep up this ridiculous custom—pray who might now ever need to glide through the By-Ways

for dear life's sake? Indeed, I doubted if they ever had been used, even in the time of Old Vivian.

Etienne's devotion to the old traditions had always annoyed me, so it was perfectly illogical on my part to resent his breaking through this one, in not only reminding me of it, but also in offering to share it with me. Yet I did resent it, and felt myself stiffen in every fibre as, holding myself haughtily erect, I declined his companionship, and ignored his suggestion that the time had come. I had thought he would feel snubbed, or show displeasure at my answer, but he only said, with cold insistence:

"I must beg you to understand that I cannot allow you to go alone."

"You wish me to break my oath?" I asked—and I was very angry.

"It does not hold with me," he said, adding, I thought contemptuously, "you would be panic-stricken, shut in with bats and rats, between the walls —all alone."

"The oath holds with everyone," I said, haughtily, "unless under certain conditions. When I go, I go at a time of my own choosing—and alone. It is odd that a Rappelle should have forgotten this."

A hot color surged across his face; it was as if I had struck him with a whip.

"Thank you," he said, icily, "for reminding me of my proper place—of the difference in our positions. As, however, I happen to have assumed the responsibility of your personal safety, I must, as your husband, forbid you to explore the By-Ways without me."

"Meaning the custom dies?" I demanded, ashamed of my sensation of relief, and, because of it, the more indignant with Etienne.

"Unless I should need to crawl away from justice, like a sneaking robber," he said, sarcastically, "when I

will beg your forgiveness for having dared to take care of you, and ask you to take care of me. Perhaps——"

A sharp knock at the door interrupted him. I wondered, as I heard it, who had had the courage to open the outside one of baize—and before he had time to say "Come in," Herbert entered.

"Excuse lack of ceremony," said my cousin, glancing quickly, and anxiously, at me, "but you must both come and look at the gorgeous jewels the house holds! The women have got them all out, on show."

"At your request?" demanded Etienne, sharply.

"Yes," said Herbert, his sunny smile irradiating his handsome face, "at my request, Rappelle. I wanted to ask you to get the Gypsy's Opal, Theo, but Lilian tells me she had it last, and has mislaid it."

"Lilian had it? When, Herbert?" I asked, quickly.

"Last night, I believe. She wanted to see if it was becoming (preparing for wedding presents, perhaps)" —his smile became a sneer—"and lost it, in her careless way. Don't worry, Dolly—it will turn up all right, I'm sure."

XVII

I did not get upstairs until very late, and then I spent an hour in the Cell of Flagellation before going to bed. There was, indeed, need that I should pray long and earnestly that night, for forgiveness of my many, many shortcomings. When, at last, I allowed myself to lay my weary head upon my pillow, I expected to fall asleep at once from over-fatigue; but tormenting thoughts kept me wide awake till dawn.

Herbert had entered the library, in spite of the closed baize door, to protect me from Etienne's displeasure, and had persuaded the women to show their jewels at that late hour, in order to get the necessary excuse. This I knew, and I feared Etienne suspected. Would Etienne be foolish enough to credit the absurd gossip about Herbert and me? Then I began to fret about Monsieur Randoce; about the mislaying of my opal; about Etienne's thoughts in regard to the miniature; about everything, in short, that had happened or that was likely to happen, until, at dawn, I fell into an uneasy sleep, nightmare ridden, from which I was thankful to be roused by my little Josette.

She brought the news that Etienne and Monsieur Randoce had gone to town by the early train. I was very much relieved. The evil hour of explanations was thus indefinitely postponed, and Monsieur Randoce definitely got rid of. Curiously enough, everybody appeared the gayer for this departure. It was as though the atmosphere had suddenly grown lighter. Infected by this change in the social oxygen, Mrs. Ainslie suggested a driving party by moonlight.

"Is Etienne coming to-night, Theo?" Lilian asked.

I did not know, and disliked very much saying so.

"Probably not, Miss Lilian," said Hervey, before my ignorance could be noticed. "Still, since nothing but the unexpected is likely to happen, lightning never strikes a man twice in the same spot—once being generally enough to kill—I'd half count Mr. Rappelle in, and half out."

Having finished this lengthy answer, and diverted the attention of the entire company to himself, Hervey began to serve the breakfast with his customary assiduity.

"I heard of some people at a house-party going to a dance in a charming way," said Mrs. Ainslie, who was absorbed in her own suggestion. "They went in masks and dominos, drawing for partners, and didn't know whom they were to dance with till they got to the house. They managed by choosing ribbons, before they met, and pinning them on their shoulders. The blue man took a blue girl—and so on."

"We might draw for wagons that way," said Mr. Carrington, looking at Lilian. "Rappelle has several single traps in the stables."

Everybody laughed, and Mr. Carrington blushed furiously.

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Nelly Love, with a frightened start. "What if, instead of Bracey—don't color up so, my cherub—an unkind Providence should send me off to drive, alone, with Bandhar? I couldn't stand it, Bandhar, my boy, I really couldn't! You'd have to let me choose again."

Mr. Bandhar grinned; he did not believe her. He was convinced that every woman present secretly hoped to have him for her Jehu. His conceit was so intensely amusing, that before I knew what I was about I was gazing at him wistfully, and not until I had enjoyed the simper of gratified vanity that my

glance elicited did I realize how outrageously I was misbehaving. A frantic giggle from Nelly Love told me of my fault.

"Stop ogling me, Billy Bandhar!" she cried. "Can't you see you're making the little parson green with jealousy? He'll forget his cloth and fight you, if you don't stop staring."

"I ain't looking at you," said Mr. Bandhar, indignantly, "I'm looking at Mrs. Rap——"

"Hush, hush, you old Ananias, you! Next thing you'll be dropping down dead among the breakfast dishes, just like old thing-um-bob himself."

"Is that a blasphemous remark, Theo?" whispered Jane, at my elbow. "But no, I know it's not, because you can talk light-tonguedly about all the bad people in the Bible, the devil and others—why, so they do of some of the good ones, too! Adam, now. You remember the conundrum, Theo? It ends: 'I don't care A—dam!' And the other, about 'shutting out the dam—p air!' I think they're silly and, after all, Adam was dull, and Eve disobedient, poor thing; so except for having children they didn't count for much. Poor, poor Eve! To begin with stupid Adam and a slimy serpent, and end up with borning a murderer— No, Mrs. Love, I'd rather not say out what I've been telling Theo. It's uninteresting, and it might hurt people's feelings." She looked at Mr. Brace. He smiled back at her. "May I go now, Theo, please?" she said, then whispered hurriedly: "I have turns of thinking him feeble-minded, when he smiles so foolishly, and I ought to respect the clergy if I'm going to be a truly religious child."

"What do two knives mean?" asked Lilian, suddenly. "Theo's put two on her plate without knowing it."

"Nothing, Miss Braithe," said Mr. Carrington, soothingly, "just nothing at all."

"They must mean something," mused Lilian, puck-

ering her pretty forehead. "I wish I could remember."

"A hidjeous mistake and a gory quarrel," said Nelly Love, looking wicked.

"Really?" questioned Lilian, earnestly.

"Never mind, Lilian," I said, smiling. "One mistake the more won't count with me, I make so many daily—and I'm a splendid fighter, so I'm sure to come off best in any quarrel."

"He who fights and runs away, will live to fight another David," muttered Hervey, *sotto voce*, behind my chair. "Though why, seeing Goliath dropped down dead then and there—some sayings are peculiar."

That evening Lilian brought me the ribbon I was to wear, saying she had chosen it for me.

"The arrangement is awfully clever, Theo, though I say it myself. I made bows that would go well with the girls' dresses, and sent out a lot to the stables for Brett"—the coachman—"to put on the wagons as he wished. So the men won't know how they've fared till the last minute. Cute idea, I think. I'm dead sick of seeing you in black, so I picked out this pale green ribbon for you. Looks pretty, doesn't it? I'll fasten it on your shoulder myself."

I was flattered; rarely did Lilian show such an interest.

"Thank you, Lilian. But fancy your choosing green for me ! It would suit your fair hair far better than my black."

"I have yellow," she said, constrainedly. "I'm sorry if you are not pleased."

"Nonsense, child!" I said. Then, prompted by a mischievous demon, I added, "Green means forsaken, you know—that's all."

"Theo! I had forgotten it!" she cried.

"Green is forsaken,
And yellow's——

Oh, yellow's 'forsworn'! There, it's just like you, Theo Braithe! So mean and nasty! I never am enjoying myself but you do some beastly thing to spoil everything."

Her sweet voice ran up and down in a pathetic arpeggio of minor cadences. As for me, I was ashamed of myself, and apologized.

"I am so sorry, Lilian. I meant nothing by that nonsense. Please forgive me! I like the green ribbon very much."

"Nonsense," she repeated, scornfully, "nonsense, indeed! I'll tell you what it is, Madam Groceress, if you took a little more notice of signs that crop up under your very nose, you wouldn't sail so close to the wind. Yes, dear Mrs. Ainslie," in answer to a gentle tap at the door, "coming directly! I'm just pinning on my Theo's shoulder-knot. Nasty sly cat," to me, as our visitor was heard moving away, "always sneaking, and snooping, and listening at key-holes! There, come along, do, and when you're just reeking with enjoyment, you may increase it by remembering that you've made me miserable."

Her reproaches made me unhappy—I felt they were deserved—but I had not time to say so, since she hurried away to join the crowd of black dominos already waiting for us at the top of the staircase. I looked curiously at my companions as we rustled down to the drawing-room, trying, vainly, to guess who was who. It pleased me to see several green shoulder-knots besides my own, for I thought this meant that I had drawn what would assure me a place in one of the double wagons.

The men were as thoroughly disguised as the women; save for the difference in height they looked exactly alike. Then I saw what had before escaped my notice—the ribbons of the same color were tied in bows of a different pattern. Mine was in a simple

bow, but the green one on the shoulder of the girl next to me was in a true-lover's knot. I glanced at the men. Their ribbons were varied in the same way. A tall domino wore the bow matching mine, and, from his awkward movements, I guessed him to be Mr. Bandhar. I smiled behind my mask, remembering my foolish glances of the morning. The prospect of a long drive with such a dullard was appalling, but the knowledge that there would be others in the wagon—since I did not alone wear green—comforted me.

But when I descended the steps with my cavalier I found that I had been mistaken. Brett had amused himself by mixing things up as much as possible. On the railings of the seats in the three-seated wagon he had tied three separate colors: red, white, and blue. The double dog-cart wore pink and green, but the green bow did not match mine. No, I, with Mr. Bandhar, was given a buggy drawn by two horses; the fastest horses in the stables I noticed, with a qualm of terror, as I got in. Poor Mr. Bandhar was a wretched driver.

Sighing deeply, and repressing a wicked wish that one of the Allenby girls were in my place, I resigned myself to my fate and, so soon as we were out of the avenue, took off my mask. Mr. Bandhar did not follow my example, neither did he attempt more than a scanty grunt in response to my would-be civil remarks. Deciding that he was as disappointed as I in the companion chance had given him, I felt ashamed of my own vanity in taking it for granted that he would be pleased. For this reason I made no objection when he turned westward, instead of following the road by the river, where the view, because of the glorious moonlight, would be exceptionally fine, since I thought he might at least have his own choice in that. Neither did I object when he jerked up the top of the buggy, though I preferred it down, but I was thankful that

we had been late in getting off. It was already after ten.

Although supper had not been ordered till twelve, I thought it would do no harm to get home well before that hour. I might plead the necessity of arriving earlier than the others, as hostess, and did Mr. Bandhar remain in the sulks he would be as willing to return as I. Indeed, I congratulated myself upon his sharing my wishes when, after reaching the end of what had, in old times, been our avenue, he turned into a road that, twisting around a tract of fields and woodland, made a pretty, if short, drive from Braithe.

My companion not wishing to talk, I thought it would not be rude if I closed my eyes for a moment or two, just to rest them. I was so very tired after my sleeplessness of the past night, and my head ached from over-fretting. Etienne and I were on bad terms; my opal, after a search through Lilian's possessions, remained invisible; and although I felt sure it would be found later, since I could not believe it had been stolen—Braithe was too full of people, I thought, to give thieves a chance—still, its loss worried me.

But the motion of the buggy was soothing, the rhythmical sound of the horse's hoofs served as a lullaby. I leaned my head against the side of the hood, I closed my eyes, I forgot my worries—I drowsed off, waked with a start, napped again, then fell into a profound slumber that lasted a very long time.

I was roused from this heavy sleep by a dream—a most unpleasant dream.

I thought I was in a sail-boat with Etienne upon a wide stretch of moonlit water. We sat close together, his arm around me; with his free hand he grasped the tiller, guiding our white-sailed craft. But although he held me firmly he appeared unconscious of my presence, staring straight ahead as if only thinking

of steering the boat, never of me. I was—so it seemed—but a passenger for whom it was his duty to care—his uninteresting duty. In my dream I felt this keenly, and looked anxiously forward, hoping for the sight of our landing-place, where I might relieve him of myself—his cargo.

Then I became aware of something moving just behind us and, turning, saw a masked man crouching down on the narrow stern. His eyes, through the slits of his mask, gleamed like blue flames, and I felt that I had met their strange glances before, but where, I could not remember. He thrust out a stealthy hand and cautiously laid it upon the tiller, just behind Etienne's; then he steered our boat. Etienne, unconscious, staring straight before him, did not see that the masked man had changed our course, and I, I could not speak, could not cry out that shipwreck threatened; could not even motion to the jagged rocks, whose cruel points showed black above the foam that surged across them, toward which we were swiftly sailing.

I dreamed that I made a desperate effort to scream a warning, and, as I strove, the man lifted his mask and I saw the handsome, wicked face of Old Vivian, gleaming white and diabolical in the moonlight. I awoke.

The horses were scrambling, with the agility of cats, up a very steep hill. On either hand rose rocky banks, surmounted by dense woods. My head rested against my companion's breast, his arm was around me, clasping me close, because the difficulties of the road made driving with one hand impossible. As I became conscious of my position we topped the hill and, in the white splendor of the moon's light, the whole country became visible for miles. Although but a world of farmsteads and woodland, like that just back of Braithe, it was quite new to me; for the hori-

zon, far beyond us, was barred by the line of the Shawangunk Mountains.

Before I had fully shaken off the stupor following my long slumber, the horses plunged down the hill, and I became aware, from the skill shown in their management, that the masked man beside me could not be Mr. Bandhar. Until we reached the foot of what was almost a precipice I knew I ought not move, as my companion must, from any sudden change on my part, lose control of the spirited horses, already wild with their desire to run down the hill. He held me as firmly and easily as if I had been a little child. The horses, flinging their weight upon the reins in their determination to set the pace themselves, made the muscles of his arm rise as tight as whip-cord; yet he did not stir, but sat like a rock, supporting me, controlling the horses, without apparent exertion.

The horror of my nightmare still surrounded me with an atmosphere of dread; and, as my mind cleared, it did not dissipate, but increased. For I soon saw that the night was far advanced, the moon was no longer in the zenith, but swinging toward the west, and the chill of the hours that follow midnight was abroad. The lateness of the hour, the strange surroundings, and the presence of the masked man beside me, so paralyzed me with terror that even when we had reached the level, and the horses had settled down into a steady trot, I could not, for a few moments, either speak or move.

It was in vain I told myself that my companion was some member of my own house-party, that I ought to speak at once, and tell him he had lost his road; in vain that shame at my position urged me to action. No, I dared not even lift my head from its resting-place against his heart, for I saw, in imagination, the face of Old Vivian behind that mask. Suddenly, involuntarily, I shivered as with a chill.

Very gently, with infinite precaution, I was replaced in my corner of the buggy; the horses were pulled down to a walk, and my companion, leaning forward, began to draw something from beneath the seat. With equal gentleness and precaution, my trembling fingers making the task one of great difficulty, I lifted the soft, slouched hat from the head of the stooping man. The white moonlight showed the close-cropped curls of Herbert Fayne.

I cried out, in my amazement, in my great relief; and Herbert, starting up, took off his mask and smiled at me. Then, all in a moment, a rush of thoughts crowded into my mind, and my feeling of relief was gone. Herbert knew every road in the country-side, so he had not lost his way. And his smile had something sinister in it, his blue eyes an unpleasantly triumphant gleam. I thought suddenly of the great gulf of years that stretched between my knowledge of my boy cousin, and of this, yes, this unknown man. In those years, the years that make or mar us all, how had the man beside me lived and thought? He was, in truth, a stranger. A stranger with an unfortunate resemblance to our common ancestor, Vivian; a stranger who, in the chill, late night, reminded me of the family Leopards, and the motto, Gare Griffes.

It was in vain that I said to myself that it was both unnatural, and foolish, to feel so toward my cousin—to have such uncanny thoughts, to suspect evil. Even as I told myself that it was only one of Herbert's wild pranks, that I must put up with for the moment, I was wondering what had been the unpardonable offence, that had closed the doors of Braithe to him during the last years of Mr. Braithe's life; and recalling every fault that he had committed during his boyhood. Even as I strove to be tolerant toward this last folly, I was preparing to judge him adversely.

In the meantime he had pulled a cloak from underneath the seat, and would have put it over my shoulders, but the sight of it broke the spell that bound me —for it was one of my own wraps. It was a mantle of black velvet, ornamented with a tracery of jet; lined with pale lilac satin, and with clasps of silver. These last a gift of Etienne's—one showing his weakness for Braithe follies—leopards' heads of silver, with topaz eyes. Each topaz seemed to gather light as Herbert lifted the cloak, and each line of jet showed a glancing reflection of the moon's cold rays.

"My cloak!" I exclaimed. "How did you happen to have it with you? But it didn't happen," I went on in sudden indignation, "you brought it! Who gave it to you? Why did you pretend to be Mr. Bandhar? How did you know I was to drive with you, Herbert, and why have we come so far?"

"Put this on," he said, still trying to wrap the cloak around me, "and ask one question at a time. Don't be foolish, Dolly"—he spoke with tender imperiousness as I evaded his efforts—"but put this on directly, please. I can't have you catching cold."

A new idea flashed into my mind.

"Put down the buggy-top, please," I said, briefly, "and as far as it will go."

He laughed, and there was a ring of excitement in his laughter.

"I must obey first?" he said. "So be it," and the hood went down. "Now it's your turn, Dolly."

"Take off your domino," I commanded.

He hesitated, laughed again, and saying, "Well then, here goes!" slipped it off. He was not in evening dress, but wore a suit of dark serge.

I laid a finger on his sleeve. "What does this mean?" I demanded.

He looked down at me with fond admiration, and laughed again; a laugh that added to my anxiety, for

it was the laugh of a lover, foolishly proud of his sweetheart's wit.

"I must have played Bandhar to the life, Dolly," said Herbert, "to have taken you in! I didn't dare speak, however, and you were so sleepy you weren't so clever as usual. O Dolly, my darling, I love you so! I have loved you all my life."

"Hush!" I said, imperiously. "You must not say such things to me even in jest, Herbert, fond as you are of talking nonsense. You must remember that I am grown up, and married."

"Married!" he echoed, scornfully. "A marriage that any court in the country could, and shall, annul."

"Be still, Herbert," I cried, indignantly, "how dare you——"

"Hear me out," he broke in, "for I mean to speak—and fully. I made Lilian give you that ribbon to-night, and myself tied its mate on this wagon. I pretended to be that fool Bandhar, fearing your terrible conservatism might make you insist upon going in one of the double wagons, if you knew I was to be your driver. For you've snubbed me since I fought Randoce for your rose, and I can't imagine why. Poor Randoce, how I did hate him!" He spoke as if years had elapsed since then; as if Monsieur Randoce had not left Braithe only that morning. "Yes," he went on, "Randoce taught me how matters were with me. I've flirted all my life, Dolly, as you know, but I never knew what love really meant till now. Why," he laughed a little, "I actually hated to own up to myself that my time had come. I realize now that what made me half-hearted in all my other affairs was this dormant fondness for you. I always meant to marry you when we grew up. Many's the time I've punched Jim Wylde's head for saying I shouldn't."

He laughed again softly. I did not speak, but sat

quite still—listening. And the trees of the woodland, closing in on either side the road that stretched straight and white before us in the moonlight, seemed to listen with me; whispering to each other, with breathless, uneasy rustlings, to be silent, to keep very still, that they might the better—listen. In the death-like quiet of the late night I could hear my heart throbbing, throbbing, in its ever-growing fear.

Herbert spoke again, his voice sweet and silky—and I thought of the purr of the leopard.

"To-night we shall be children again, Dolly, and play at camping-out, under the trees. Just ahead a rough track leads into the very heart of these woods, and there I chose, this morning, the prettiest, grassy hollow for our camp. I hid some rugs away in a hollow tree; and I got everything ready. You shall have a fire, and a glass of wine, directly, to stop that shivering. Why, Dolly, you look as though I frightened you, your face is white!"

Something in his voice, a truly Braithe cadence, told me that my fear pleased him—since it showed I felt his power.

"White?" I said, with a poor pretence at ease. "The moonlight makes it appear so, probably. You, too, look white. But enough of jesting, Herbert, we must hurry home."

"To-morrow," he went on, as if I had not spoken, "we'll go on to an old house tucked away in a lonely valley, twenty odd miles from here—I went there once with Uncle Braithe, for fishing, when I was a boy. They may look for us up and down the river, dear, but will never think of looking there. Why don't you act like yourself, my little cousin? You sit there staring at me with such a strange expression in your beautiful eyes. What does it mean, Dolly? Do I please you a little, do you think me a handsome fellow? Come, tell me!"

He was superbly, magnificently handsome, as he swayed toward me, his full lips curved in the habitual half-amused, half-mocking smile. He was, I thought, as Jane had said, singularly like Guido's Apollo. The moonlight glorified his beauty of feature, the careless grace of his attitude, the cold splendor of his heavy-lidded blue eyes. I remembered that, as a boy, he had never given up the pursuit of what he desired, unless compelled to do so by a power stronger than his own. And search as I might among old memories, I could not recollect his having ever shown any noble feeling that I might now hope to awaken.

"Well, am I never to hear you say you love me?" His voice had sunk almost to a whisper. The uneasy trees, flinging, here and there, the shadow of a branch across the white road, rustled a nervous accompaniment. "I know you love me, you foolish girl, so why not tell me so? If I had been anybody but your scapegrace cousin, you wouldn't have lain so peacefully asleep in my arms. You are a high-strung creature, Dora; even in your sleep you would shrink from the touch of any man unless you loved him. Ah! as I held you, cradled against my breast, I wished to God I could drive on through the night—forever."

I braced myself for a great effort. I must, I felt, make a strong appeal to him at once; yet the utter uselessness of it tied my tongue and sapped my strength, I was so sure I would not prevail. I felt as though I were again in the clutches of a terrible nightmare—it was all so unnatural, so unreal. I was Etienne's wife, in Etienne's light wagon, behind Etienne's favorite horses—yet in the power of Herbert Fayne! How near might we be, I wondered, to the track that was to lead me to ruin? My reputation was already hurt, I feared, by my long absence from the Manor; but if I could keep to the high-road, we might meet someone to whom I could cry out for aid,

saying we had lost our way, and so at last reach home.

The horses walked quietly, willing to rest. Herbert let them idle along, enjoying this slow approach to the fulfilment of his desire—an added enjoyment, now that he had me trapped. Of what use, I asked myself, to try honest means with this treacherous Braithe? Let me use deceit instead, the only weapon that might help me now.

"You are more Fayne than Braithe to-night, Bertie," I said, gently.

"How so?" he asked, an expression of eager curiosity replacing that of passion in his eyes; and I realized, with swift self-hatred, that now, as always, my unexpectedness had been, to him, my chief charm. My changing moods—and thoughts—had kept him interested, on the alert, in the need of the constant use of all his powers. This suited his cat-like nature.

I laughed a little, and wondered that I did it so well.

"A Braithe would not have denied a woman the pleasure of being wooed, Bertie," I said, softly; "a Braithe would have left her the joy of giving up everything for—for her lover; a Braithe would never have planned to win—or lose—by so rough a coup as this. You are no true Braithe, my cousin, but just a Fayne; showing yourself a tyro yet at this great game—called Love."

He knit his brows, my words stung him, but not with the result I had hoped.

"I have not one drop of Fayne blood in my body," he said, quickly. "I am more a Braithe than you."

I looked at him, raising my eyebrows in scornful surprise. What might this mean?

"My mother," he went on, "had the same good taste that you show, Dolly; she preferred her handsome cousin to her lawful lord."

His shocking words, showing such callous disrespect for his mother's memory, for every decency of life, made it impossible for me to play my part longer.

"For shame!" I cried, hotly. "How can you speak so wickedly! Take me home—I hate you—despise you! To-morrow you shall leave Braithe."

"Dear me, Dolly," he said, plaintively, "what a little vixen you are! I thought I would please you by proving a double cousin-ship, but women are kittle cattle, indeed." He sighed deeply, and looked aggrieved, as he always had, when people disapproved of him. "I won't take you home," he continued, "so you needn't ask it. I believe, for all your show of temper, that you would rather be with me than with that common Rappelle."

Again despair clutched at my heart. I felt forsaken—lost. I shuddered again, as with a chill.

"It's that silk thing that makes you shiver so," said Herbert, and before I could prevent him he unloosened the fastening of my domino, and flung it from my shoulders. "Ah!" he exclaimed beneath his breath, as holding my velvet mantle with which he had meant to replace the thin domino, he stared at me as if he would never have done. The look in his eyes insulted me, yet I sustained it proudly, determined he should not know I understood. I even spoke, to prove I felt no fear.

"A fitting camping dress, truly!" I said, with a haughty smile. "I see that you realize your folly now."

I wore a gown of black gauze, upon whose sombre folds gleamed—woven through the stuff—great shining silken spots. The bodice, cut low, was oddly trimmed with peacocks' feathers of jet, the quills starting from the waist, so that the tips made the finish around the top of the corsage. About my throat was clasped a collar of diamonds. I wore

bracelets of diamonds—one, a long diamond-studded snake upon my upper arm; in my hair a diamond crescent.

"You shimmer—like the moon!" cried Herbert, with sudden passion. "You sparkle—like the stars!" He slipped the reins over one arm and caught me to him, covering my face and shoulders with kisses; fierce yet languorous kisses, that seared my very soul, and drove me mad.

With strength born of desperation I wrenched myself free, stood upright, seized the whip, and struck the horses—once, twice, with all the force in me. They reared, plunged, then galloped wildly down the road. The reins ran out with a jerk, but Herbert, with what seemed to me fiendish dexterity, caught them before they could slip across his hand and so over the dashboard, as I had hoped they might. Then, drawing me back into my place, he wound the reins about his wrists with one swift turn of his skilful hands, and strove to master the runaways.

We were soon out of the woodland, and on into the open country. Presently, we rushed past farmsteads, showing black amidst their encircling meadows, where horses turned out to pasture, startled by our wild approach, ran snorting away across the home-field. On, on, we raced, through the white night till, with an awful sinking of the heart, I saw that Herbert was slowly but surely conquering.

Then I cried out to the horses—Etienne's horses—urging them on; I clapped my hands, blazing with jewels—Etienne's jewels—and gave the sharp, exciting call that jockeys use when speeding their trotters.

"Be quiet, Theo!" Herbert commanded.

I heard him cursing under his breath. I paid no heed, but cried out again and again. There followed an odd sound. One rein had snapped—and a race with Death began. I hoped that Death might win;

since Etienne would never forgive me, and Janey was provided for.

The wild exhilaration that danger brings to us Braithes tingled through my veins. I laughed aloud with the joy of it, and again urged on the maddened horses with voice and hand. The knowledge that they, too, might be killed awoke no pity; they and I belonged to Etienne. Better that we should die than that he should be robbed. And on we tore through the night.

But Herbert, who had so lately bragged himself pure Braithe, was afraid. He dreaded what I longed for, and the danger left him cold. With teeth set, the veins on his forehead swollen with the intensity of his past exertions, and his face rigid in its outlines, he sat, motionless, awaiting the final moment; when he would strive to save, not himself, but the woman he loved, from bodily harm. For I knew well that the risk we ran would have been nothing to him had he been alone; I knew that in his desperate fear for me he was suffering as he had never before suffered in his selfish life—and I rejoiced.

Then I saw that before us, just beyond a farm-house rising black against the moonlight, the road turned abruptly where a great rock, topped by trees, jutted sharply out. I said to myself that the end was there, and I thanked God for making it so sure.

"Look out, Dolly! Don't jump, for God's sake!" cried Herbert suddenly. "I must run them into the ditch——"

He flung himself, with all his strength, upon the rein that still held. Chaos followed.

XVIII

The sudden stoppage of the wagon tossed me out upon the grass, high up on the bank, above the ditch; but the violence of the shock neither stunned me nor caused me to forget for even an instant the urgent necessity of escape. I stumbled to my feet, shaken, almost breathless, with fear lest Herbert were close at hand, and looked dizzily about me, with terrified eyes. I must get to the farm-house we had just passed, must seek refuge there.

Then I saw that the buggy had come to a stand-still but a few feet farther on. One of the lightly built wheels had been shattered by the sharp turn, and the wrecked wagon, becoming entangled among the rocks and low bushes that edged the roadside, had served as an effectual check upon the frightened horses. They now stood quiet, with drooping crests. Close at their heels lay Herbert, the reins still twisted about his wrists. He did not move; was he stunned —or dead?

At first I thought only that now I had time to reach my haven in safety, unmolested; but before I had taken three steps in the direction of the farm-house, I realized the possibility of the horses again starting on their mad race through the night, dragging at their heels that helpless figure, mangling it out of every semblance of humanity. I turned back.

It was all I could do to force myself to approach, but conscience had made itself master. I must do my duty and leave the rest to God. Herbert lay upon

his back, his beautiful face upturned to heaven, a streak of blood on his right temple. I thought that he was dead, and that I had killed him. Yet I could not bring myself to touch him, but went instead to the horses' heads, to prevent their running again. More I could not do.

The moon hung low in the west, but still shed a cold white light over meadow and woodland. The night, all nature, seemed to look with chill remoteness at my distress. I felt so very lonely—forsaken. The horses seemed to share my feelings; now and again they rested their velvety noses against my bare shoulders, as if seeking sympathy and the comfort of a closer companionship.

I tried to speak cheeringly, encouragingly, to do all I could for the poor creatures for whose wild run I was partly responsible. Childish anxieties mingled with great ones in my distracted mind. I felt nervously for the diamond crescent; had it fallen from my hair? No, it still clung fast. Then I thought with concern of my velvet cloak; was it by the roadside, some distance back? Where was it? Were they sitting up for me at Braithe, my gay guests, wearing out the night with cards, champagne, unkind mirth over my prolonged absence? This last, earlier in the evening, but by now—? A grave scandal in progress must not be treated too lightly by those close at hand; later perhaps, when at a safe distance from Braithe, they might use what license they wished in speaking of me, of——

I could not endure this last thought. I bore Etienne's honest name; he had trusted me with it. Was it to be dragged through the mud because of my lack of forethought, prudence, common-sense? I wanted Etienne to come for me—to take me home. I longer for his mere presence; let him scold, or be silently scornful, I did not care if only he came.

A deep silence filled the white world surrounding me. Herbert's face shown pale in the cold light; the horses, save for an occasional deep sigh, stood quiet; and I—I dared not move.

It seemed hours before I heard, far in the distance, the sound of a horse's easy trot, the light rattle of wheels. It came from the same road we had followed. I listened breathlessly. The horses pricked up their ears. What if it should turn aside, into one of the farms farther up the road? Then, as the sound drew nearer, I was assailed by the dread of being found thus, alone, past midnight, without my husband. What might not people think? And but part of the truth was fit to tell. A buggy approached at an easy pace; the top was up, but the waning moonlight enabled me to see that only one person was in it. A feeling of intense shame held me silent. I knew I must ask aid, but waited, in spite of myself, until the last moment. The vehicle reached us and drew up sharply. The one occupant leaned out.

"Theo Braithe! What has happened?"

It was Dr. Strong.

"O doctor, doctor," I cried, then faltered, laughed hysterically, and began to cry.

Dr. Strong wasted neither time nor words but, tying his horse to the nearest fence, came quickly to my side. Then he caught sight of Herbert.

"He's dead," I sobbed, "dead, and I suppose I killed him!"

Dr. Strong unfastened the traces, unbuckled the reins from the bits, and led the horses away. Then, bidding me hold them, said, "Now, I'll see to Rappelle."

"It's not Etienne," I almost whispered, "it's Herbert Fayne."

"What!" he exclaimed, in tones of shocked sur-

prise, drawing down his shaggy eyebrows till his eyes became nothing but bright gray sparks. "Where's Rappelle, then, Theo?"

"Away," I faltered.

"Humph!" muttered the doctor, and went to Herbert. He leaned down, examined him hastily, then, with no gentle touch, disengaged the reins from his desperate clutch, and, returning with them, fastened the horses to the fence. The doctor's manner of treating Herbert told me that my cousin lived, and, furthermore, that he was in no danger.

"Can I help you, Dr. Strong?" I asked, feeling that I ought to do so.

"No," said the doctor, gruffly.

"I think there is wine in the wagon," I ventured, timidly.

"Wine!" echoed the doctor, "now, why the deuce—but fetch it, if it hasn't tumbled out. And do get something for your shoulders."

I found a basket, as I had expected, under the seat, with a goodly provision of sandwiches, a bottle of Burgundy, and one small tumbler. This last added to my indignation—we were to have drunk from the same glass. The doctor forced a little of the Burgundy down Herbert's throat.

"Stand where he can see you when he opens his eyes," he commanded; "he's coming to. Your shoulders are still uncovered, Theo; go—no, wait a minute—a-h!"

Herbert sighed, lifted his beautifully cut eyelids, looked up at me, smiled faintly—spoke.

"Dolly—" he said, haltingly, "Dolly—my darling—are—you—all—right?" Then he saw Dr. Strong. "Ah!" he murmured, "my pipe is out."

"Go get a horse blanket—anything," growled the doctor, glancing sharply at me, "and put it around you. Go, child, go!"

"Let me help you," I pleaded. "What are you going to do, Dr. Strong?"

"Get you and this dare-devil home," he said, crossly. "You shall go with me; the people over there," jerking his head in the direction of the farm-house, "will look after him. I know them."

I ran back along the road, found and put on my cloak, my pretty velvet cloak—ah, how I dreaded facing the giver! I no longer wished for Etienne, no longer wanted him to come to me. In my shame at my position I was thankful to be with my old friend, Dr. Strong. Even he disapproved of me—so what might be expected of Etienne?

The irate doctor roused the poor farmer from his peaceful slumber, and put Herbert in his charge. The man was one of his people—those whom Dr. Strong cared for always became his eager servitors—and readily promised to bring Herbert back to Braithe Manor.

"He's taken a drop too much," I heard the doctor say, "so if he talks nonsense don't notice it; and his head is giddy, too, after his fall. First he lost the road, then one of the reins broke—he hasn't been in these parts since he was a boy. He's a cousin of the Braithes, Herbert Braithe Fayne."

"I know all about the Braithes," said the farmer, slowly (we had left Herbert alone by the roadside and gone, in the doctor's buggy, to get help at the farm), "and I guess the less known the better. The man who's bought the old place is square, folks say; he's paid off all the debts anyway. The girl he's married is the best of the lot, I understand, though that ain't sayin' much"—I drew back into the shadow of the buggy-top—"an' they do say she's an awful pritty creature, and good to the poor, though Lord knows she ain't had nothin' much to give but good works. Well, well, she ain't never been tried none. I guess

now she sees the color of money she'll show her blood! Kick over the traces, maybe, like as not——"

"Have you, Theo?" asked the doctor, sternly, yet sadly, as we drove away homeward. "Have you kicked over the traces, child?"

"No, no, Dr. Strong," I cried, a big lump rising in my throat and choking me. "I don't even want to."

The doctor was a shy man, yet, poor soul, felt it his duty to catechise me. "Do you—do you," he said, haltingly, "do you love your husband, Theo?"

"I like him better than any—any other man," I said, beginning to sob in spite of myself, "but I fear I'm not the falling in love kind. Not that it matters much, Dr. Strong, since he doesn't care about me."

"Rubbish!" said the doctor, shortly. "Now tell me how you came to be so many miles from home at this hour of the night."

I told him what I could—of the choice of driving partners by ribbons, of my long nap, and of the runaway.

"Why was there food in your wagon, Theo?" asked the doctor. "I dare say you're hungry now, or faint. Come, let's have something to eat; I stowed it away in here." He pulled the basket from beneath the seat, and, drawing the horse down to a walk, again uncorked the Burgundy and made me drink some. "Humph!" he muttered, tasting it himself, "the best in the cellar. I thought so. Now, eat this sandwich, child—I don't care if you want it or not," as I protested, "you're hysterical through faintness."

I obeyed, and, although swallowing was difficult, I felt the better for the food.

"Chicken and lettuce," said the doctor to himself, rummaging through the basket, "and these, of rare roast beef! Do you like chicken and lettuce sandwiches, Theo?"

"Yes."

"He prefers roast beef, I suppose?"

I did not answer.

"He does, I see," said the doctor. "Theo, I am your very old friend. I am fond of you, child, and, what's more, I believe in you. Will you give me your confidence?"

"I cannot," I said, desperately, "but indeed, indeed I am grateful, Dr. Strong."

"Did you know this food was here?" he persisted.

"No, Dr. Strong."

"Did you expect to drive with your cousin?"

"No."

"Did the horses run away of their own deviltry, Theo?"

"No," I almost whispered.

To my amazement the doctor chuckled suddenly. I looked at him wonderingly, and he smiled.

"I was only thinking of the Scotch countess," he said, "and that blood will tell. Dear, dear, what strange ideas your poor step-mother had in regard to your likeness to the Scotch woman! And," speaking very slowly, "I'm not so sure that she was altogether wrong. But Mr. Fayne needs change of air. Braithe doesn't suit his constitution. You must tell him to pack, Theo."

"I have," I said.

The doctor chuckled again, then whipped up his horse, and we sped swiftly back along the road I had travelled so short a time before, under such widely different circumstances. Behind us, from the distance, came the sound of the steady jog-trot of the farmer's horses; Herbert, too, was retracing the road in a way he had little expected. I began again to feel as if I were living in a dream; as though Herbert's wild plans and strange behavior, his sudden passion for me—his old playfellow—and my own frantic struggle to escape him, might well be but a mental

phantasmagoria, that the fast coming dawn would dispel.

Dr. Strong hardly spoke. He was accustomed to the prolonged silences of solitude, and I was no check upon his thoughts, or his ways, since we had been friends always.

Upon the stone parapet of the single-arched bridge, that spans our little brook before the entrance gate, crouched the Chevalier—watching. With a bark of delight that sounded like a cry, he bounded over the wheel, into the buggy. Frantic with joyous relief over my safe return, he paid no attention to the comfort of Dr. Strong, but scrambling upon his lap used his knees as a point of vantage from which, whining and sighing, he overwhelmed me with caresses. My poor Charles Stuart! He had spent the night on the bridge.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the hardly used doctor, "but the creature is human. Sounds as if he were crying over you—but I can't see through him. Sit down, then, Chevalier! There's room between us. Can't you ride bodkin for once? I must see to drive."

The friendly nudge from the doctor's elbow was the only hint needed by my clever collie. He squeezed down between us like a lamb; only, pleased by the doctor's kindly voice and sympathy, he did insist upon kissing him, too. The attention was not resented, to my surprise, for Dr. Strong was no dog-lover.

"If the dog goes on so," he said, cheerfully, "what'll the rest do, eh, Madam Theo?" and he smiled kindly.

"I hope Janey is asleep, Dr. Strong."

"There's that remarkable butler left. Rappelle tells me you're the apple of his eye, and, bless me, there he is now!"

Standing between the Leopards I saw, in the pale gray light—for dawn was at hand—a small figure, that turned and ran across the lawn toward the house as

we approached. It was, indeed, my husband's faithful henchman, Hervey Merle. He was ready to help me from the buggy when we drew up before the door.

"Welcome home, dear madam," he said, his voice shaking. "Thank God that you are safe! We are grateful to you, sir, for bringing her—since wisdom is above rubies, and a stitch in time saves a lot of unripping."

"You will come in, Dr. Strong?" I asked.

"Yes, my dear, to wait for my patient." Wheels were to be heard coming along the avenue.

"Is Mr. Fayne seriously hurt, sir?" asked Hervey. "Was there an accident?"

I gave him a brief account of the upset, and inquired for my guests. Dr. Strong, still seated in his buggy, listened attentively to the answer. I could not but wonder if he, too, had noticed the tone of Hervey's voice when he inquired as to Herbert's injuries; there had been in it such a strange anxiety that they might be great.

"Mr. Carrington," said Hervey, "has just gone to the stables, with Brett, to get up a team to start in search of you, Mrs. Rappelle. Hope deferred makes the heart sick at its stomach, as we all know, and they are both painfully worried—for misery makes strange bedfellows of high and low."

"And the rest of the party, Hervey?"

"In the drawing-room, Mrs. Rappelle, full to the brim with champagne—not that they needed it to keep their spirits up! A wise woman buildeth her own house, but foolish folks like to pull it down, if they can—and Mr. Bandhar has bet heavily—but here comes Mr. Fayne. Ah! as an ox goeth to the slaughter-house so pride goeth before destruction. Let me take your horse to the stables, doctor, and minister comfort to the minds diseased there. Mr. Carrington and Brett will both rejoice." So saying

he took the doctor's place in the buggy and drove away.

"A character that," said the doctor, "and I thought all had passed away! Go into the house, my dear, and leave this young man to me. I shall advise change of air—to be taken to-morrow morning."

At the threshold Mrs. Love met me. Her childish face was very pale, great circles beneath her big brown eyes, and her mop of fair hair dishevelled.

To my surprise she flung both arms around my neck and, clinging to me, began to cry.

"Oh, my dear!" she sobbed, under her breath, as if fearful of being overheard. "Oh, my lovely girl, I am glad, glad, glad, that you are home, safe and sound!"

Touched by this show of real affection, I kissed her gently. "Thank you for caring," I said.

"Caring!" she exclaimed, striving to check her tears while, releasing me, she sought and—after much trouble—found a pocket but no handkerchief. I gave her mine. "Caring! I've been almost wild, and those vile harpies in there," indicating the door of the drawing-room with a shake of her curls, "have been simply gloating. I hate the lot of them."

Her eyes flashed, she stamped her foot and clinched her fists—a very fury.

"We were upset," I explained, hoping to calm her. "The horses ran away. Herbert is hurt."

"Badly?" she demanded.

"Who's hurt?" Lilian had come up behind us unheard. "Herbert? Seriously, Theo? Will he die?"

The note of eager anxiety that this might be so, thrilling through her sweet voice, had something terrible in it. Her cheeks wore their deepest rose tint, she looked very lovely. Nelly Love eyed her keenly.

"No, Lilian," I said, hastily, "a slight cut on the temple, nothing serious."

The color left my sister's cheeks, she grew very pale. "Why, I do believe you're sorry!" said Mrs. Love. "I'm rather disappointed, myself, that he's not hurt enough to have to stay a-bed for a week; or hit hard enough to knock the devil out of him, anyway. But I don't want him dead—as you do. What's he done that you hate him so? There's not much of old Mother Eve in my make-up, as a general thing, but I'm hanged if her infernal curiosity doesn't stand up on its hind legs now. Come, tell us all about it. Oh, dear, here they all come!"

It was as she said. They came *en masse* from the drawing-room as Herbert, escorted by Dr. Strong, Mr. Carrington, Hervey, and some of the servants, entered the house. There followed an odd silence, to which succeeded a very storm of exclamations, questions, regrets, insinuations, laughter. It was all exceedingly unpleasant, but I had to endure the discomfort as best I might. Dr. Strong hustled Herbert into his room, which opened off the hall, to plaster the ugly cut below his temple; but Herbert paused in the doorway and addressed the crowd:

"Please forgive me, good people," he said, with his sunniest smile, "for not being killed outright. I know I deserved it—first losing my way, then my temper, and lastly my control of the horses. I've not been a good boy to-night."

"You've been a damn fool," said Mr. Bandhar, with startling frankness, and an awful solemnity of utterance. He had taken too much wine and was cross drunk. "If Mrs. Rappelle had been with me, I'd have known how to take care of her. You're stuck on yourself, that's what's the matter with you. I bet you'd bolted, and that's what got her home safe. I've lost a pot of money, I have, and all because of you."

"Oh, be quiet, do!" sang Nelly Love at the top of her lungs. "You make me really ill! I never can

stand the top-notch spirits of tipsy people when I'm not so myself."

"I ain't tipsy—" protested Bandhar, still more solemnly, but wild laughter from the others drowned his voice.

Mrs. Allenby now came forward to express her regrets for the accident, and the others followed suit.

At last—when I despaired of ever being alone—they dispersed for the night. I was thankful to gain my own room, and hoped for only my faithful Chevalier as companion—he had not left me for a moment since my return—but in this I was disappointed. Josette was waiting for me, and her tear-stained face told me that my *femme de chambre* was not without affection for her mistress. Later Lilian came in. Her pretty face was very pale. She looked careworn, unhappy.

"I hope you're satisfied," she began, as Josette left us, "for you certainly have done it now! Rappelle will turn you off, sure as shooting, and then what will become of me, I'd like to know? It was all your fault, because you would choose that hateful ribbon:

'Oh, green's forsaken,'

Of course you went and got lost after that, and——"

"Hush!" I said, sternly. "Do you mean to say you think I liked being lost with Herbert? You gave me the ribbon yourself, but that is neither here nor there, it does not matter now. Do you believe I was late on purpose?"

"Yes, I do, Theo Braithe! You love flirting better than your life. You thought Bertie a tough subject—I wish to God he were dead, the devil—and subdue him you must and would. Well, it's done. He's a fool about you, in his nasty, treacherous way—but you needn't flatter yourself, it won't last long.

How you got home again to-night I really don't know. I thought your luck was over."

I knew that I had escaped through God's great mercy, but I was shy, as always, about speaking of my faith to Lilian. I thought, however, that she ought to know of Herbert's true character, disagreeable as it was to me to speak of my experience; for, although she talked against him, I had noticed that she seemed ever ready to follow his suggestions—as in the matter of the ribbons—and to be guided by him. So I told her just what had taken place. She was paler even than before, when I had finished.

"Then he is in earnest!" she exclaimed, in tones of despair. "What shall we do? What can we do?"

"Do?" I repeated, surprised. "Why, nothing. He shall leave Braithe to-morrow."

Here Lilian's eyes fell upon my gown, and she started back in evident horror. "Peacocks' feathers!" she exclaimed. "That dreadful frock! First the green ribbon, then that hateful pattern—no wonder you came to grief!"

"You don't mention the opal's loss," I said. I was tired and cross, but that did not excuse the speech; and I had the grace to feel ashamed the moment it had crossed my lips.

"The opal!" cried Lilian, her cheeks flushing. "I had forgotten it—bless you for reminding me. The opal, the dear, dear opal! O Theo, we're all right, after all."

She laughed softly, and began to dance lightly about the room. Then she swept a courtesy, kissed my cheek, and without a word of explanation went away.

XIX

The day had come when I left my little oratory, where I had poured out my heart in gratitude for my safety, and flung myself upon my bed, hoping for a few hours of sleep. But because of my overstrung nerves—for I could not cease re-living, in my brain, the wild happenings of the night—and my poignant anxiety in regard to Etienne's judgment, this hope proved vain. I was glad indeed when all the clocks in the house, in uneven chorus, struck seven. Then I rose, and dressing without the help of my over-tired maid, went down to breakfast quietly with Jane. I found her in the dining-room with Hervey, helping him put the finishing touches to the breakfast table.

"The early bird catches the willing horse, Mrs. Rappelle," said Hervey, including Janey and me in his gentle, deprecatory smile, "and Miss Jane is helping me, as you see."

One of his subordinates here summoned him from the room.

"I wish he would not get the proverbs all wrong," said Janey, sighing as if in despair over this peculiarity of Hervey's. "If only one might change people just a little bit, Theo, how nice it would be!"

"Begin on me, pet," I said, smiling. "Tell me my faults and I'll try to change."

To my surprise the child colored hotly.

"You would rather not, Janey? Very well. I'll imagine you think me perfect." She got up hastily and hid her face on my shoulder. "Janey!" I cried, much alarmed. "My dear little sister! What is it? Have I hurt your feelings? Tell me what pains you."

"I'm so afraid you will try to change, and—die!"

she burst out, desperately. "Mrs. Love says you'd be too good to live without it, that flirting is what keeps you alive. Oh, dear, oh, dear, now I've gone and told!"

Fortunately Hervey came back at this moment, to say that Mr. Gill had come for a puppy promised him —Brett's bull terrier had a fine growing family—and would Miss Jane say which one she could best spare? Forgetting her woes the child danced away into the hall, but presently reappeared, followed, at what might be called a bashful distance, by Brett and Mr. Gill.

"Mrs. Gill has sent messages, Theo," Janey announced, with importance, "and I thought Mr. Gill looked as if he'd rather give 'em to you than to me."

"Oh, Miss Jane!" objected Mr. Gill into his hat—he held it tight against his mouth. "Dear me, not at all."

I went forward and greeted the two men. Both told me, shyly, of their pleasure in learning of my safe return.

"I mentioned to Mrs. Gill that I'd best step over, and pass a few words as to our congratulations on your —Mrs. Gill said providential—escape, and Mrs. Gill was quite agreeable as to my so doing, Mrs. Rappelle."

" 'Twas a new rein, Mrs. Rappelle, as broke," said Brett quickly, in his turn, "and I can't see why them horses ran. Thank God, you're safe, anyway."

I was very grateful for such kind thoughts and said so. The men would not take a cup of coffee, and, wishing to show my appreciation of their courtesy, I took roses from the vases on the sideboard, and offered to each a small bunch. "I am so fond of roses," I said, smiling, "that Mr. Rappelle has had a rose-garden made for me. These monthly roses will bloom for me all summer, I hope."

"They should be trewly pleased to do so," said Mr. Gill, blushing deeply.

"Mrs. Gill may not have any of this variety," I added.

"Mrs. Gill will be trewly grateful," said her young husband, in a tone that said he would like to see her presume to be anything else.

"I hear you were coming to look for me, Brett," I said, gently, as I gave him the flowers, "that you, with Mr. Carrington, were getting ready to do so when I arrived. Thank you, Brett. It is very pleasant to me to know of the interest you took in my safety."

"And now let's go look at the puppies," said Jane, mercifully relieving Brett from the agony of speech.

Hervey stared at me as they awkwardly took their leave, his head on one side, an odd smile curving his lips. Then he said, slowly: "In your beautiful heart, dear madam, the rich and the poor meet together, since the Lord is their Maker, big and small, after all."

I smiled my thanks for his kind words. "And now, Peter," I said, gayly, "since I have robbed you to pay Paul, I must get more roses for your vases." I went into the pantry for basket and scissors.

"No, no," said Hervey, following me, "the sideboard looks as well without flowers. Why gild the lily and paint the rosy cheek, dear madam?"

I laughed.

"I am going to the rose-garden, Hervey," I protested, "so I may as well gather some."

"Gather your roses in May and December, Mrs. Rappelle, and may your heyday be ever shining," was the quaint response. And the Chevalier and I wandered on into the garden together.

When we reached the old sun-dial, that had marked the time for so many generations of Braithes, I did not turn aside into the rose-garden, but followed the

path through the woodland to the chapel. An odd desire to stand close to Lydia's grave impelled me thither. How thankful she would have been for Herbert's failure! My eyes filled with tears as I thought of my unselfish little stepmother—of her beautiful generosity, of her loyal heart.

In the doorway of the chapel stood Mr. Brace. He came forward eagerly to meet me, and, holding out his hand, congratulated me, shyly, upon my escape. I was touched by his friendly feeling.

"Perhaps," he said—still more shyly—"you will come in, and we can offer up a prayer of thanksgiving together."

I assented gratefully. And when I returned to the house I was almost myself again. I began to believe I had been worrying unnecessarily over what Etienne might think. Perhaps he, too, would be kind. I had stopped long enough in the garden to gather some roses. These I intended for the green punch-bowl in the library, as peace-offering to Etienne. I was amused to see that the baize door was closed, showing that Hervey wished to prevent anyone from entering his master's sanctum during his absence. Rather an unnecessary precaution I thought as I opened it, and the heavy mahogany door it concealed, and entered, since the only one of our guests stirring appeared to be Mr. Bandhar, of whom I had caught a glimpse as he was hurrying down to the river for his morning swim.

The room looked remarkably cheerful in the morning sunshine. Even the portrait of Old Vivian wore almost a benevolent expression. Humming a little French song, I busied myself over my task, filling the bowl on the big table with roses. In the midst of a silent moment, when carefully detaching the thorns from the stem of an exquisite red rosebud, I became conscious that I was not alone. Glancing up I saw

Etienne standing on the hearth-rug, watching me. He had entered noiselessly, through the secret door, from his room behind the chimney.

"Etienne!" I exclaimed in pleased surprise, the color rushing into my cheeks, forgetting for the moment my previous dread of meeting him. "When did you come home? How long have you been here?"

"I came home over an hour ago," he said, slowly. "I have been here perhaps two minutes—enjoying a picture of wifely devotion."

I had been so glad to see him, but his words, the sarcastic tone of his usually pleasant voice, drove the blood back to my heart. Pale, trembling, I looked at him across the roses, terrified by this realization of all my fears.

"Pray sit down," he continued, pushing Old Vivian's great arm-chair toward me. "I have much to say to you."

But I moved to a distant sofa, and seated myself in the middle. Did he choose either place beside me I could slip to the farther end, and so avoid his close neighborhood. It was an old sofa, covered with richly flowered brocade, ruby-colored to match the velvet of the chairs, and on its high back crouched the two Leopards of the House. I was tired of filling the chair of my great-great-great-grandfather, while Etienne looked down upon me from his commanding position upon the hearth-rug. I knew that I should need every advantage I could seize in the coming storm—he was so very angry, and I, to a certain extent, guilty.

Instead of sharing my sofa, however, he placed a chair directly in front of me, and sitting down, faced me, as judge before a culprit. At the same time he took a letter from his pocket and said:

"It's a pity Randoce can't see you now. He would rush for palette and brush to paint your portrait

for—the hundreth time, Theo? How many pictures of my wife did the man carry away?"

I did not answer. I could not answer sneers.

"That wine-colored brocade suits your rich beauty, Theo. Stay, let me heap these cushions beneath this arm, and lay your hand, with its red rosebud, upon them—so," arranging arm and hand to suit his strange fancy. "Now you are posed to read a love-letter, and here is one."

He placed the letter he had taken from his pocket upon my lap; I saw that it was from Monsieur Randoce. My cup was surely over-full. Desperation roused my Braithe blood.

"Perhaps you will read it to me?" I said, softly. "But first let me give you this rose—I took all its thorns off myself, Etienne," I smiled up at him, "but I did not prick my fingers."

"No," he thundered in sudden fury, "you play with edged tools so often that you have learned a marvellous dexterity. The thorns of a half-blown rose possess no danger for your well-accustomed fingers. No," he lowered his voice and spoke slowly, with incisive bitterness, "it is not your fingers that are cut, but your reputation—and the hearts of otherwise honest men."

I would have sprung to my feet—he grasped my hands and held me down; I would have poured out the flood of indignant words that rushed to my lips—but he enforced silence.

"Wait until I have done before you speak," he said, imperiously. "Time so gained may help you to arrange a defence of your conduct—you will need all your wit to find excuses that I can accept, believe me."

"I make none," I said, with paling lips, "since I knew nothing of the miniature, and remained out late last night because of an accident. You are crushing

my hands, Etienne!" He released them. "Ah! my lovely rose, it droops—wilted."

He took the soft, rosy thing from me, and, absently, as if not thinking of what he did, laid it on the chimney-piece beneath the portrait of Old Vivian. Returning, he drew his chair sidewise directly in front of me, close against my knees, and, thus imprisoning me, reseated himself.

"May I ask how late it was when the 'accident' took place?"

I remained silent.

"You prefer not to answer?" he went on. "Perhaps it is as well, since I have heard too much to believe your probable version of the affair readily. Dr. Strong—I stopped in to see him on my way home—told me what he thought might exonerate you; of the choice by ribbon, and the broken rein. As Brett received private orders in regard to the horses, trap, ribbon—everything, in short, I am not impressed with your innocence, as the simple doctor wished me to be, but merely by his desire to shield you. Ah, they are all alike, all infected with the same madness!" He rose and began to pace up and down before me. "Even that fool Bandhar, the butt of everybody, bet heavily that you would not return because, as he kindly informs me, he always loses. He adds that I need not insult him by offering to reimburse him, as he considers his money well lost in your cause. He also states that if I cannot stay at home to look after you myself, I had better put you in his charge when I go away!"

Etienne's voice was steeped in bitterness, but an insane desire to laugh at Mr. Bandhar's wish to play chaperon—a Braithe desire—took possession of me; and between the tears in my heart and the laughter in my blood, I felt on the verge of an hysterical attack.

"This moves you to mirth, I see," said Etienne, sit-

ting down again, and looking sternly into my eyes. "Perhaps it is natural that it should. I confess that a woman of your singular temperament is difficult for a commonplace man, like myself, to comprehend. When you offered yourself in marriage to me——"

"What?" I exclaimed, lifting my drooping head to stare at him in astonishment, startled out of my tremulousness by the extraordinary nature of this new insult. "I offered myself? I fail to understand you."

"When you offered yourself in marriage to me," he repeated steadily, "I was surprised, but—because of my knowledge of Braithe ways—not too much so. However, I was fool enough—in spite of this knowledge—to imagine that you would behave yourself with common decency when I acceded to your rather strange request. And I shall ask, no, command you to do so in future," he was shaken by a sudden tempest of passion. "I'll not have my honest name soiled with the dirt of a divorce court, either, so make no mistake. I am a common man. I hold by the old common ways and beliefs. You are my wife, and my wife you shall remain—till death us do part."

His voice sank, a strange expression stole into his hard eyes, a look of iron determination crept about his mouth. I saw and heard, yet all the time my mind was searching, searching. My anger against these false charges was fast dying. He spoke again.

"Because you happen to amuse yourself, to flirt, intellectually, I hold you none the less——"

I had found my clue at last, and was so much absorbed in following it up that I interrupted him rudely:

"I understand it all," I cried, in an outburst of scornful indignation. "He knew but too well how to keep his wicked memory green! Yes, you may well speak of the Braithes with contempt. I come of an evil race, indeed. The letter he left for me drove my

poor Lydia almost mad; it hastened her death. And Lilian's—thank God I did not read it, though he meant I should—Lilian's killed the remnant of affection that, after his death, she seemed to have for him. It is my turn now."

Etienne looked at me as if he thought I were trying to turn him from further rebuke.

"Pray explain yourself," he said, coldly.

I looked at him with a sudden revulsion of feeling. A great pity for this honest man, who had been cheated into marrying me, filled my heart.

"Listen, Etienne," I said, gravely, regaining my calmness with an effort, "and tell me if what I suspect is true. In the letter that I forwarded you after Mr. Braithe's death, did he ask you to marry me?"

Etienne colored slightly. "Why do you always call your father 'Mr. Braithe'?" he asked, curiously. "It sounds strangely."

"He behaved as a stranger—an unkind one—to his children, Etienne. How may I think of God as the great All-Father if I use the same word for Mr. Braithe? I wish that your father had been mine, that I might have been born Theodora Rappelle, child of an honest ancestry." My eyes filled with tears, my cheeks flushed. I was deeply moved.

Etienne looked at me with increased suspicion in his cold eyes, but I paid no heed. He had a right to suspect me of acting a part to deceive him; he had a right to think the worst. My right, in my turn, was to see Mr. Braithe's letter. I demanded it.

"No, no," said Etienne, hastily, "I prefer not."

"Your preference is as nothing compared with my right," I insisted, "but if you won't show it, tell me the gist of it. You are usually just, Etienne."

He remained silent, but I read the look in his eyes. "You think I already know it?" I said, almost whispering in my horror at his thought.

"I think it extremely likely."

This was, indeed, an insult. I knew that my face grew white as I asked, in low tones, "Have I ever lied to you? Have I ever, to your knowledge or belief, lied to any one?"

"No," he said, shortly. "And if you will swear, by all you hold sacred—but what a fool I am! You perjured yourself when you married me. You swore to obey me. Of course I knew you did not mean the rest of it, but that I believed."

"And you?" I asked, with sudden heat, "are you blameless? You meant as little as I." Then I remembered his money, but I thought I would not speak of it; it was too hateful, too degrading. Honesty, however, drove me to do so. "I beg your pardon," I said, slowly. "You have lived up to your part of the bargain—more than done so. Never mind about the letter, Etienne," I went on, sadly. "A man so deeply wronged as you is naturally suspicious of evil. Had I known that letter was a trap, I would have burned it. You may believe me or not as you choose. Since I am Mr. Braithe's daughter the great law of God ordains that I must suffer for his sin, but if I can prevent it you shall not."

"May I ask your remedy?"

I looked at him earnestly, but he had half turned away, and was staring into the mass of ferns that filled the old fireplace.

"It is for you to say what you wish done, Etienne. I suppose a marriage like ours could—" I faltered, then stopped short. What I felt I must say was so entirely contrary to my own view of what was right.

"Finish your sentence, Theo."

"Could be annulled," I said at last, desperately. "I think I had better become Theo Braithe again."

There followed a long silence, then Etienne spoke:

"If the name that you now bear," he said, slowly,

"pleases you—as you say it does—why do you make this suggestion? Not that our marriage could be annulled; the law forbids."

"I was not thinking of myself," I murmured, "but of you." Then, taking my courage in both hands, I burst out with the truth. "I think you ought to be free, Etienne."

"Free to do what?" he questioned.

I could not bring myself to answer.

"Free to marry again, Theo? Can you honestly say that you think that would be right? Answer, please."

"No," I said, under my breath.

"Then of what use would my freedom be to me?" he asked.

"You would be rid of me, at least," I insisted, my eyes brimming with the long-repressed tears.

He took both my hands gently in his.

"Tell me, Theo," he said, quietly, "did you know of last night's arrangements beforehand?"

"No, Etienne."

"Did you have even an inkling that the miniature was being painted? Don't cry, child."

"No, no, indeed," I said, earnestly. "And I am so sorry, so very sorry about it. And I don't mean to behave badly, Etienne, I——"

"There, there," he said, patting my hands soothingly, "perhaps I've been over-hasty after all. Come, open that poor chap's letter, and let's see if he has come to his senses. But you must be careful, Theo," as, with fingers that shook a little, I opened the envelope; "the part of policeman is not at all to my taste; don't force it upon me again." Inside the letter, a conventional one of thanks, was tucked a little note. "Ah!" said Etienne, as his keen eyes spied it. "What follows now, Theo?"

"This," I said calmly, although the blood surged into my face, and handing him the letter, "this you

will read to me, but the note I shall beg you to destroy unread."

He took them both and sat watching me curiously.

"Meaning, since you cannot—I shall not?" he said.

I shook my head. "Meaning simply," I answered, gravely, "that neither of us wishes to treat a friend ill, by watching him when he is not himself." And I would have given my rope of pearls to have understood what the look in Etienne's eyes meant.

Alas! I felt always at a disadvantage with him, because he was my benefactor and my husband. My own feelings were in too great a tumult to read his aright. I lost my power, my light touch, my skill in extricating myself from threatening situations, when I was alone with him.

"I can't help being sorry for Randoce," said Etienne, musingly. "He's a good sort generally, and he was my friend. I don't want to lose all my friends, Theo." He smiled, quizzically. "Supposing the next time you want to flirt you try your hand on me. What do you say to that, will it amuse you sufficiently?"

"It's odd that you have never been in love," I said —then was horrified to have thought aloud.

"Why?" asked Etienne, quickly.

"Because you are so warm-hearted," I said, and had the grace to blush at my words.

"Who told you I had never been in love, Theo?"

He pushed his chair back as he spoke, and rose. The interview was evidently over.

"You did, Etienne."

"Then I lied," he said, coolly. "I suppose I was ashamed to confess my weakness."

"O Etienne!" I gasped; it seemed to me that tragedy lurked close at hand. "Did she—did she die?" I spoke very softly.

"No," he said, quietly, "she married."

My tongue ran away with me again. "O Etienne!" I cried, "what will you do if she becomes a widow?"

"I most sincerely hope she may not," he said, beginning to tear Monsieur Randoce's note into small pieces, and dropping them—one by one—into the waste-paper basket.

I sat silent, my eyes fixed upon him, but my thoughts far away. Had I, by any chance, met this woman? Was I likely to meet her? Where did she live? Whom had she married?

"You regret that it is destroyed?" asked Etienne, looking up, and misinterpreting my steady gaze. "You wish that you might have read it?"

"No," I said, quickly. "I was not thinking of the note at all."

"Of the writer, perhaps, Theo?"

"No," I answered, shortly, "I had forgotten his existence."

"What is it that interests you then?" he inquired. "Of what are you thinking so intently. Ah!" as the color swept into my cheeks, "is it possible that you are studying me with a view to——"

"No," I interrupted, brusquely, vexed by his smile, by the amusement in his eyes, "I was thinking of—of her."

"Her?" he repeated, looking at me in surprise. "Yes, yes," as I would have explained, "I know now whom you mean. Well, what can I tell you of—her?"

I bitterly regretted having spoken on impulse, and so betrayed what I felt to be an unpardonable curiosity. But I had gone too far to make silence possible.

"I was merely wondering," I said, lamely, though striving to appear at ease, "if I had had the pleasure of meeting her when we were in town." Then recovering myself a little, I added: "I trust that she, at least, is happily married!"

"No," said Etienne, rather sadly, "I fear not. She has married a very ordinary man, and he fails to understand her."

He fell silent, absorbed in his own thoughts. I was glad that I could not read them—since that I was forgotten seemed but too probable.

"I shall speak to Fayne," he said, at last, abruptly. "He ought to remember that he is grown up. The time for boyish deviltry is over."

"He is going away this morning," I said.

"Going away?" Etienne repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes," I said, hastily, "his visit is ended." Then remembering that I had not yet seen Mr. Braithe's unpardonable letter, the letter I had so foolishly forwarded, I asked for it again. But Etienne evinced no disposition to show it. I persisted, however. "Please, please, Etienne," I pleaded, "just to prove you really believe now that I was in ignorance of his plan. You do believe, Etienne?"

"Yes, yes," he said, uncomfortably, "and if I must, I must. But I'd much rather not talk about it, Theo."

"I know. Go on, please. He said——"

"Well, he said, that is he gave me to understand—that is——"

"Yes," I murmured, encouragingly.

"He said that if you sent the letter, Theo," Etienne spoke very gravely, "it would mean that you agreed with him in his wishes. And now let's forget all about it. I only hope he has not made you too miserable."

"He said more than that," I said, slowly, thinking hard as I went over Etienne's version. I knew Mr. Braithe too well to be so kindly cheated. "He said that the sending of his letter by me meant that I was as anxious, as eager, as he, that the plan might be carried out—that I had, in point of fact, sug-

gested, 'very delicately, of course, my dear Rappelle——' "

"Theo!" cried Etienne, staring at me in almost comical surprise. "How can you expect me to believe that you did not see the letter when——"

"When I repeat it word for word?" I said, finishing his sentence for him. I smiled coldly. "You forget, Etienne, that I am his daughter."

"Don't look so hard and cold," he began.

Before he had time to say more there came a gentle, yet peremptory, knock at the door; and, without waiting for permission, Hervey entered.

"Now what under heaven do you want?" asked Etienne, crossly.

But I, I smiled a kind welcome. I was only too much pleased by the coming of Hervey Merle.

XX

Hervey advanced slowly toward us through the long room. Etienne grew impatient.

"Well, Merle," he said, "does Mr. Bandhar want to see me again, or what is it? I hope that you've not come to bother me about nothing."

"Mr. Bandhar, sir," said Hervey, his eyes fixed upon me with a look in them that reminded me of the Chevalier, "Mr. Bandhar, sir, is in the river."

"What?" exclaimed Etienne, startled.

"Endeavoring to swim, sir," said Hervey, still looking at me, although addressing Etienne. "Leander swam the hellish pond, as we all know, but though you can take a horse to the water you can't make him dive."

Etienne smiled. "Then what have you come for?" he asked.

"A peer eye at the gates of Paradise, sir, is not to my taste. I told Mr. Fayne I'd let you know if he wanted to see you—he's outside."

"Tell him to come in," said Etienne. "But first get me a pretty vase, Merle, a dainty one. Mrs. Rappelle has given me a rose. I want to put it on my desk—it must not wither too soon." He looked at me and smiled. I blushed. His acceptance of the half-crushed bud amazed me. I had thought it forgotten, in its hiding-place under the portrait of Old Vivian. Hervey looked at the floor. He was the picture of a meek family servant.

"A vase, sir, for a rose? Oh, yes, sir. The quality of mercy is not strange, since it is more blessed to give

than to receive sour looks. Mr. Gill and Brett, Mrs. Rappelle, were very grateful for the roses. The lower orders love a charming giver. But Mr. Fayne will grow impatient. Patient waiters grow cross, as the proverb says."

He selected a small vase from a cabinet in a distant corner, and left the room.

"Since you have been distributing your roses," said Etienne, half jestingly, half sadly, "I suppose I must be thankful not to have been forgotten."

I blushed again, as I said hurriedly, "Mrs. Gill cares so much for flowers, Etienne, and poor Brett had been up all night because of my accident. Some coachmen would have scolded."

"I thought it was Gill who came," said Etienne, watching me closely.

"Yes, but of course his wife sent him, Etienne."

"Oh, of course, Theo," ironically. "And Merle, what did he get?" I was silent. "The thorns I should judge, from his curious remarks. Really I sometimes think he does me the honor to be jealous of me—not that he has any reason to be; you seem more his friend than mine."

"Etienne!" I murmured, deprecatingly. My color came and went under his steady gaze. I was not enjoying myself. I even wished Herbert would come, and wondered what had become of him.

"An odd position mine," continued Etienne, "when you stop to consider it. My butler one of my rivals! I suppose he thinks I ought to have been content to serve behind your chair, since I'm not so far above him after all—seeing that my great-grandfather was," turning to nod at Old Vivian, "his servant."

"Etienne!" I exclaimed, "how can you say such things! You are unkind."

"Unkind?" he questioned, but here Janey opened the door and thrust in her golden head.

"May I come in?" she piped, gayly, in her sweet childish treble. "Mrs. Love is with me."

I was grateful for the interruption.

"Hervey asked me to put this on your desk, Etienne," said my small sister, carrying, with pretty care, the little vase, now filled with water. "He's awful cross—I don't know why—and said something about not minding looking for a rich man in the eye of a needle so much as being obliged to hunt for a snake in the grass."

"He means that little-tin-god-on-wheels, Fayne," explained Mrs. Love, shaking her mop of curls at me and looking wicked. "Hervey's the dearest old chap alive, and the way he picks up everything beats the band! Fayne was out-Heroding Herod shaking ancestors off his Family Tree on my head the other day, hard nuts every one of them I'll bet, begging your pardon, lovely girl"; she caught my hand and kissed it. "You're the saint that leavens the lump, you know. Well, to continue, I got headache from the bumps on my occiput (don't grin, Jane, my child, it's very uncivil!) and I went wild. 'The first ancestor you ever had was the Snake on the Tree of Knowledge,' I said, 'and as I'm not Grandmamma Eve, you needn't talk rot to me.' Then Hervey he ups and says—for he has the big head, Hervey has, 'Those who live in glass houses, Mrs. Love, shouldn't throw stones from inside; since, though seeing through a glass darkens, when a pane is gone any fool can read the writing on the wall.' I suppose the dear old boy doesn't approve of my style of conversation, Mrs. Theo."

"You can afford to laugh at tall talk about ancestry," said Etienne, courteously.

"Ancestry be hanged!" she said, quickly. "Yes, I have old blood—and look at me. A nice kind of scion I am."

"You are a Love," I said, gently.

"Theo doesn't care for old family, either," said small Jane, "but I'm afraid I do. I like all the horrible things it brings, secrets, and ghosts, and portraits—" She glanced over her shoulder at Old Vivian. "Theo says that every man must stand on his own feet, not on a pile of dry ancestral bones; that he should be brave, loyal-hearted, true—like you and your people, you know, Etienne"—she interpolated, nodding to her brother-in-law and disregarding my efforts to silence her, "kind to the weak, and all that. And then she doesn't care where he was born or how he was bred, for it doesn't matter, seeing that the world is the better for his being in it. Anyway Christ was nothing but a carpenter."

A profound silence followed Jane's small sermon. Etienne looked earnestly at me, as though he were trying to read my inmost thoughts; while Mrs. Love stared as earnestly at little Jane. The child always seemed to fascinate her.

"Jane, my infant prodigy," she said at last, "when you weary of life in these baronial halls come and dwell with me. I just adore you."

"Then don't make fun of me, Mrs. Love," the child answered promptly, "for my sense of humor is as crooked as my back, and jokes like that make me want to cuss as hard as you do."

Mrs. Love burst into wild laughter. "Isn't she just the cutest kid?" she cried, turning to me for sympathy. "I'd rather have her for a friend than anyone I know—barring you, of course, Madam R."

As she stopped speaking, Herbert entered. He was looking extremely handsome, the slight pallor resulting from his accident giving him a look of intellectuality. I saw that he had replaced the white sticking-plaster with which the doctor had mended his cut, by a black strip, most becoming to his wonderful

complexion and sunny hair. An air of gentle melancholy—as of one misunderstood by his fellow-men, yet bearing them no ill-will for their lack of comprehension—added to his usual grace of manner. Etienne greeted him kindly.

"Glad you got off with that scratch, Fayne," he said. "You had a narrow escape, I understand."

"Thank you, Rappelle, for letting me down so easy," said Herbert, gently. "Most people are fond of jumping on the under dog—and that's what I am just now, I guess."

"I thought that people were always sorry for the under dog, Herbert," piped Jane. "Though why," turning to Mrs. Love and me, and lowering her voice, "I can't imagine; for he's sometimes a nasty, biting, treacherous thing, and deserves to be got under and punished."

"She beats the band, she certainly does!" said Mrs. Love, in fond admiration. "Hush! Listen to the Prodigal Son soft-soaping the Lord of the Manor. Heavens, but he has the gift of the gab! Still, that's easy, when a lie more or less doesn't matter to you."

Herbert was, indeed, apologizing with easy grace to Etienne for the misadventure of the past night.

"It was perfectly unpardonable of me to lose my way," he was saying, as we began to listen, "and Theo could not forgive me. She was quite right, too"—he flashed a quick glance at me—"since before turning into a road you should make sure of it. I ought to have asked her first."

"It was natural enough," said Etienne, kindly. "You haven't been in this neighborhood for years. As for the rein breaking, no one could have foreseen that. They were new ones, Brett tells me, and supposed to be of the best make."

"And for pretending to be Bandhar," Herbert continued, "for that's what I did, you know, as

Theo must have told you—well, I suppose it was awfully silly, but Theo's polite efforts to induce me to talk, and desperate endeavors to make believe that she wasn't bored, were too comical. Then, when she fell asleep from ennui, I lost my bearings and took the wrong turn—somehow I hated to wake her, she looked so tired, and I was afraid she might be cross."

He laughed, a sweet boyish laugh, full of innocent youthful gayety. Etienne's suspicions had vanished, that was easily seen, and Mrs. Love evidently began to judge him less harshly. And I, my heart full of bitterness, stood by and listened to his specious words without being able to give them the lie. In spite of myself, I had become almost his accomplice, since I must, perforce, share in his duplicity. I suffered intensely as I stood silent; my eyes cast down that I might, at least, avoid receiving another of his glances.

"I think that you're awfully good to me, Rappelle," he went on, his charming voice having just the right tone of guileless gratitude, "but I can't be quite comfortable while Theo is so angry—she does bear malice so long. Although, of course, she's in the right. She always is—which is rough on me and other sinners."

He sighed, in a quick boyish way, then, with apparent effort, turned the sigh into a second laugh—a sad one. He had managed, with consummate cleverness, to make me appear an ill-tempered, straitlaced creature; while he himself was but a rather thoughtless fellow, too fond of teasing an old playmate. I knew, without raising my eyes, that Etienne had begun to feel ashamed of his anger toward me, that he would be unnecessarily hospitable to Herbert in consequence. I should be obliged to join in asking Herbert to prolong his visit, or be considered unwarrantably unforgiving.

"Won't you forgive me before I go, Dolly?" Her-

bert said, suddenly. "Just for the sake of auld lang syne?"

I glanced at Etienne to see how he would take this daring speech, but like all truly generous people who believe that they have done an injustice, he was determined, apparently, to look upon Herbert as nothing but my boy cousin. Although I admired this generous spirit, somehow I felt exasperated when Etienne said:

"Nonsense, Fayne! Theo and I look to you to help us through with our house-parties. You are booked to stop with us all summer—if you will."

Herbert's splendid blue eyes flashed his triumph into mine. "May I really stay, Dora?" he asked.

This was too much for my sorely tried temper. But—and I, myself, could not understand why—my wrath was against Etienne. Herbert had suddenly become as nothing in my eyes. "Since Mr. Rappelle needs you, yes," I said, softly. "And, doubtless, he will like me to give you this rose."

So saying, I took from my bunch on the table a full-blown tea-rose, and gave it to him. Forgetting his rôle of guileless playfellow, he sprang forward, took it with too great eagerness—and pricked his fingers. I had not cared to remove any thorns for him.

"Ah, Theo!" he exclaimed, reproachfully, "it is full of thorns."

"Why, yes," I said, smiling, "Braithe fingers know how to handle thorns. We wound others with them—but skilfully avoid them ourselves."

"You have certainly wounded me," he said, slowly.

And I had the poor satisfaction of seeing Etienne uneasy.

"Greek meeting Greek, isn't it?" said Mrs. Love, with affected carelessness.

I felt ashamed of myself for—so it seemed to me—the hundredth time that morning. I had no chance

to mend matters, however, since the room was suddenly invaded by a crowd of our guests. I was told that tableaux had been suggested for Friday evening of that week. They were to be given for a local charity, so that a number of people might come without impropriety.

"We remembered that you were in mourning, dear Mrs. Rappelle," Mrs. Allenby sweetly explained.

They had come to the library to search for subjects and costumes. A pleasant bustle ensued. The large room was filled with the sound of well-modulated voices, the flutter of laces and ribbons, the scent of orris. I had an odd sensation of being an outsider, of having no real place in this gay throng; I felt old, grave, sad, and over-burdened by the weight my dead father had placed upon my shoulders. Already the knowledge of it had unsteadied me. I did not feel like myself, but instead irritable, captious, hard to please. I needed solitude, I longed for the retirement of my cell; but I was hostess, so must remain.

I was roused from my abstraction by Mrs. Allenby, who asked to see my opal.

"It has so interesting a story," she said, "that I long to see it."

I turned to Lilian—who was endeavoring to dissuade the others from their wish to have the tableaux on a Friday.

"It will bring bad luck," she said, with pretty earnestness—Mr. Carrington stood beside her, an admiring smile upon his lips—"and the tableaux will be a failure. Why not say Monday evening?—that will give us more time to prepare."

"You forget, my dear," said Mrs. Allenby, "that we must leave you on Monday, much, as I am sure, we should all like to stay on indefinitely. We have had such a perfect time," she murmured politely to me.

Mechanically I gave the civil answer required, too

much interested by Herbert's instant effort to thwart Lilian's wish to know very well what I was saying.

"If you listen to my pretty cousin, and pay attention to her whimsies," he said, a covert sneer in his voice and eyes, "the tableaux are doomed. At the eleventh hour some evil omen will be sure to wet-blanket the whole affair."

I looked with some anxiety at Lilian, always fearing a sudden explosion, yet hating the odd way in which she deferred to his every suggestion. Their attitude toward one another puzzled and irritated me at the same time. If she really detested him as much as she said, why did she yield to his wishes? I should have thought that she feared him, had I not known that the idea was ridiculous. From so unimportant a kinsman as Herbert Fayne, what had Etienne Rappelle's sister-in-law to fear? Nothing, I assured myself—yet my uneasiness remained. Yielding to a sudden impulse to interfere, I spoke to her of my opal before she had time to answer Herbert.

"Have you found the Gypsy's Opal, Lilian?" I asked, "or haven't you hunted for it yet?"

She looked at me with an expression of gratitude in her pretty blue eyes, an expression I had never before seen in them. The lovely flush of pleasant excitement stained her cheeks, from which Herbert's sneering words had robbed their usual faint color.

"No, Theo," she said, her voice so sweet and gentle that it was a pleasure to listen—that Mr. Carrington thought so was almost amusingly apparent—"no, not yet. I am sorry, but you needn't worry; I feel quite sure that it is safe."

As she finished speaking she looked at Herbert, and I saw that the look puzzled him as much as it startled me. For Lilian's eyes never held that expression of exquisite, yet dreamy, satisfaction unless

she were hugging to her heart some—to me—rather terrible idea.

That morning I seemed destined to be startled, since no sooner had Etienne heard Lilian's careless words than he said, rather sternly:

"I beg that you will search for it at once, Lilian. I had rather Theo lost all her jewels than the Gypsy's Opal. It is something I could not replace."

Lilian answered with graceful meekness, but I, I knew that for some curious reason she would be in no haste to obey. And suddenly I felt less anxiety about the gem, myself.

XXI

As had been at first suggested, the tableaux were given on Friday evening. The moon had cast the final vote against Lilian, since on Saturday night it would rise too late to act as street lamp for those returning to Hilltown. Lilian yielded gracefully to what she declared, in private to me, was all Herbert's fault. Much as I disapproved of Herbert—and his ways—I failed to see how he had had any influence in the matter. When I pressed her for an explanation she would give none, merely grumbling that she wondered at my taste, in always standing up for so nasty a person as Herbert Fayne!

Of course there were many heart-burnings and jealousies attending the development of the tableaux; but by the time Friday evening came, these had either been overcome or forced into the background. Mrs. Allenby very good-naturedly lent her splendid collection of gems to Mrs. Ainslie for the tableau in which she was to appear; and I provided Lilian with the pearls and diamonds for the jewel scene from Faust. She was to be Marguerite.

We had a fine evening, and the entire world of Hilltown came. Janey, with the Chevalier in leash as companion, was to sit up until twelve o'clock for the first time in her short life; and the child's one anxiety was that her favorite, Mrs. Strong, should come in time to secure a good seat. I did not dare hope for the presence of the busy doctor; too many people with heavy hearts were in need of him to permit of his

gratifying the gay ones. But Jane and I had expected to welcome his wife among the first comers, and the child was proportionately disappointed when she failed to appear. At the last moment, when the place Jane had so carefully reserved for her had been taken, and when a deep pucker of care had grown between my little sister's delicate eyebrows, a carriage dashed up to the door, and our friend bustled in. I went with her myself to the dressing-room.

"So sorry to be late," she explained, breathlessly, as she tossed aside the lace scarf, and patted her hair into proper outline, "but Mr. Fadd arrived just as we were finishing supper, and I had to see to a room for him. Yes, my dear, I know you would have been glad to have had him come, too; I told him so—but he's shy; I think most learned people seem to be; why, the doctor's as bashful as a boy when he isn't professional. Did you know it?"

I did know it, but took care not to say so.

"Yes, I asked Mr. Fadd to come, but the doctor had an hour off, so the professor—yes, he's a professor, but I forget of what—stayed to talk with him. Don't I like him, Theo? What makes you ask that? Yes, I like him" —she took my arm and we walked slowly toward the drawing-room—"but he scares me—that's the truth! You see," lowering her voice and speaking confidentially, "he's occult."

"Occult—" I repeated, somewhat puzzled.

"Yes, my dear, occult. He lived in India—Thibet—Ceylon, for years, and studied all sorts of queer things. You would never think it to look at him—a real pleasant man, so sympathetic and kind. No, my dear, not old—he's not fifty yet."

"I wish he had come to-night," I said, "I should like to have met him."

We entered the drawing-room, where, at the northern end, the stage had been erected, and found that

we must content ourselves with seats in the background, all the others being occupied.

"You will probably have the chance of a chat with Mr. Fadd before the week is over," said Mrs. Strong, as we took our places. "He's crazy to see Braithe House, and the Gypsy's Opal. Yes, the doctor told him all the stories. Oh, how wonderful!" as, the curtain going up, an end was put to her lively chatter.

I wanted to hear more of the strange professor. I remembered that he had been a college chum of Dr. Strong; and that Mrs. Strong had before alluded to their friendship, and to the doctor's faith in his friend's rare strength of mind and heart. But what I saw banished all thoughts of Professor Fadd.

Upon the stage wall hung two portraits, side by side. At first I thought that they had been brought from their respective places in the library and dining-room, and wondered why this had been done; then I realized that, instead of the painted pictures of Old Vivian and his wife, the Lady Sophia, I was looking at Lilian, and Herbert Fayne. Their likeness to the two dead and gone Braithes was so great that it was extremely unpleasant to me. I looked away from them. I was thankful when the curtain fell. How could they have chosen to represent such people! But the audience applauded.

Among the tableaux that followed, the one in which I was most interested was that where Lilian was to take the part of Marguerite. Owing to the delays that always occur with amateurs, this did not come until just before midnight. When the curtain at last lifted, I could not but sigh with satisfaction over Lilian's success. She was rarely lovely in the quaintly fashioned costume, her beautiful hair hanging in two braids far below her waist. At her feet knelt Mrs. Allenby—as the nurse—holding the jewel box, from which she was lifting my rivière of diamonds; while

around Lilian's graceful throat drooped my great rope of pearls. She looked, with an expression of wondering delight, at her own sweet girlish reflection in the mirror that she held in her hand.

Behind Lilian's chair, a sneering smile upon his lips, lurked Mephistopheles—Major O'Leary.

The audience, after a moment of silent delight, burst into a very storm of applause; and, the curtain falling, clapped persistently until it was again raised. This was done three times. At the last, when again all was quiet—the people really enjoying the charming picture—Lilian's eyes suddenly dilated; she half rose from her chair, and turning her gaze from the mirror in her hand, she faced us, saying, in a strained whisper:

"Listen! What is that—coming?"

The look of expectant dread in her eyes was so awful, her face had grown so ghastly beneath its rouge, that, losing my presence of mind, I did nothing to break the spell or help her; but, with the others, held my breath and listened, too.

Then, far down the avenue, I heard the sound of horses galloping; a carriage was coming, driven at a furious pace. Before I could move, or speak, it had reached the house and stopped before the door.

Lilian stood up. The mirror fell from her hands—crashing to atoms at her feet.

"The Portent!" she half gasped, half whispered. "O Theo—Theo—Theo!"

During the instant of death-like silence that followed, the air seemed filled with the harsh voice of the old clock at the stables, tolling twelve—and Carrington, springing forward from the stage side, caught her, as she fell forward unconscious.

As I made my way hastily toward the door, the room was suddenly flooded with light. Hervey, entering, had turned up the lamps.

"Mrs. Rossitur's carriage," he announced, in a high unnatural key.

One of the women in the audience laughed hysterically, and everybody began to talk at once. Then Hervey spoke again:

"I took the liberty of sending—the carriage, to the stables." And added, in an awed undertone, as if but thinking aloud, "The clock has just struck twelve!"

Mrs. Rossitur, the great personage of Hilltown, gave Hervey a pale smile of approval; and he followed me into the hall. Etienne, hurrying to meet me, to tell me not to be frightened, that Lilian was coming to, broke off to question Hervey. There was an odd note in his voice, and I noticed that his lips were white.

"The Rossitur carriage, was it, Merle?"

"I said Rossitur," said Hervey, under his breath and eying his master strangely. "A rose—or any other name, would serve as well."

Etienne glanced quickly at me, then grew still paler. "That's all right," he said, with assumed cheerfulness; "Brett will look after anybody's carriage. Come, Theo—Lilian is here."

He took my hand in his, as if I had been a child whom he wished to protect, and led me to the library. Chancing to look down the short entrance hall as we passed, I was surprised to see that the ponderous oak door was closed, and securely fastened with its heavy bolts. It was as if Hervey had, in sudden terror, striven to lock out some unwelcome guest. I saw that Etienne noticed this at the same moment, but he made no comment.

I found Lilian opening bewildered eyes—they looked like big blue flowers—and staring about her in wonder. Begging Etienne to go back to the drawing-room and look after Janey, I went quickly to Lilian, anxious to be the first to speak to her. Mrs. Ainslie and Mrs. Love, who had been taking care of

her, drew back in a frightened way, as I approached, with covert, awe-struck glances. I did not lose any time but, kneeling beside Lilian, whispered Hervey's announcement.

"Mrs. Rossitur's carriage," she repeated in low tones. "Are you sure, Theo?" and I saw that she did not believe me.

"If not Mrs. Rossitur's, then some other person's, Lilian. Hervey came in and called it out."

"Give me brandy," she commanded, but still speaking low, "a lot of it! Make those people go away."

I begged Mrs. Love to hurry on the next tableau, which was also the last; and, although she knew that Mr. Carrington was already doing so, she was quick to understand our desire to be alone, and, taking Mrs. Ainslie with her, left the room.

Herbert, the only other person in the library when I entered, had gone for the brandy. He now appeared at the door.

"Don't let him in," said Lilian, fiercely; "I won't have him gloating over—It. I want only you."

Going to meet him, I took the tray, with its decanter and glasses, from his hand.

"She wishes to be alone, Herbert. Thank you for bringing this."

"Do you believe in the old rot, Dolly?" he asked, scanning my face eagerly.

"No," I answered, softly. "But go, please."

"There was no carriage, Dolly. I ran out in time to see."

"Some echo, then," I said quickly. "It has probably given rise to the old belief. Now go."

"One moment, Dolly. Although you don't believe in the Death Coach, do you dread having people ask you about it? Shall you hate to have the subject mentioned—as have all the Braithes, from time immemorial?"

"Yes, Herbert. I don't know why——"

"I feel the same way," he said, earnestly, "and I can't make it out. My backbone stiffens and I feel haughty as the devil, the minute it's even hinted at. Do you?"

"Oh, please run away, Herbert," I urged. I did not want him to know how completely I shared his feelings, being no more able to account for them than he.

"Are you never coming, Theo?" called Lilian, irritably.

"Give her a bath," said Herbert, pointing to the brandy. "Soak her full! She deserves to be choked for yelling out that way in public. Ah, my dearest Dolly, you and I are twin souls after all!" But he went away after this shot, so I cared little about it. That I hated, like him, to have the old superstition mentioned, troubled me.

Lilian insisted upon drinking a very large portion of the brandy, but it seemed only to give her strength.

"Theo," she said, solemnly, "which one has it come for? You, or me, or Janey? Or for that devil, Herbert Fayne? For every drop of blood in his body is Braithe blood! He's threatened, as well as we." Then, with a sudden fury, she turned and shook her small clinched hand at Old Vivian, gazing malevolently down upon us from his gilt frame. "Oh, you old fiend," she hissed between her teeth, "I hate you so! You're father's very image—and Herbert's—and all the hellish lot of Braithes! You set us all going, you're responsible for all this misery. I hope you're in torture now—yes, awful torture!"

The door was pushed cautiously open and little Jane, the Chevalier trotting meekly in leash by her side, came in. She looked at Lilian with grave disapproval in her beautiful eyes, and coming close to me laid her small hand in mine.

"Well, darling," I said, as I stooped and kissed her —the unnatural brilliancy of her eyes and cheeks alarmed me—"you see poor Lilian is quite herself again."

"Yes," said Jane, coldly, "but she has been herself, all through. What if you did hear the Death Coach, Lilian," turning her stern gaze upon her sister, "was that any reason you should speak of it to the world? You have no courage—you are a coward!"

"Oh, you shut up," commanded Lilian, in sweet low tones. "I shan't stand impudence from a brat like you!"

The child lifted her head proudly. "The Braithes have always been bad," she said, haughtily, "but you are the first coward of the name."

"How dare you!" cried Lilian, angrily.

"Being—most unfortunately—a Braithe," said poor little Jane, "I dare anything! I have dared, just now, to lie. When a person (she can't be a gentlewoman, Theo, or she wouldn't poke and pry) began to ask me questions, I told her I had heard no carriage, that we had no Portent. I told her that you, Lilian, were subject to these attacks, and that she must not be alarmed."

"Oh, you nasty little thing!" screamed Lilian, stamping her foot, "I hope the Coach came for you."

"I hope it did," said the child, courageously, although her great eyes began to fill with tears, "for I'm not worth much."

I caught her in my arms, and held her close pressed to my breast. I was so near tears of admiration for her unselfishness that, in order not to cry, I laughed—speak I could not.

"Your pretty ripple laugh," she said, patting my cheek gently. "I love it, yet—somehow—it hurts a little."

"Foolish little Jane!" I said, gaining control of my-

self. "You spoil me with your pretty speeches. But listen, dear, you are not to worry. You have told no lie. There is no Death Coach—nor any such uncanny thing. Only the foolish believe in such nonsense."

"Then it was Mrs. Rossitur's carriage?" asked little Jane.

"It may have been no carriage driving up to our door, Jane," I said, very seriously, "but only the echo of one going somewhere else. That is what I believe."

"Then I'll believe it, too," said Jane, with sudden cheerfulness, "for I mean to be as much like you as I can. And when the Phantom Coach does come, Theo, let's get in and drive away gayly. With Death as coachman we can rush along at a famous pace, and when I call out to him where to drive I mean to be able to say—as you say, 'Home,' to Brett—'Heaven, please, Azrael!' "

XXII

I persuaded Janey to keep the Chevalier with her that night, hoping his warm presence—on the foot of her bed—might soothe the child to sleep. I had no difficulty in sleeping myself, since the echo of galloping hoofs held no terrors for me. But, although I had thought my mind at ease, I was roused from heavy slumber, at dawn, by a bad dream.

I dreamed that I was in the chapel at midnight, yet it was not dark, because of an odd light from without—an uncanny glare, that made the pictured saints of the windows seem alive and moving. The little church was decked with white flowers and large bows of white ribbon; but, although I knew there was to be a wedding, I could think only of the funeral of a child. Then far down the avenue I heard the rumble of wheels, the sound of horses running; the bridal coach was approaching, and at a wild pace.

I dreamed that I drew back into a pew near the door, wondering, and a little alarmed, to find myself the only guest. Then it came to me that I was there to see Etienne married to the woman he loved. And I felt so unhappy that my heart-anguish was as a bodily pain, making me faint and ill.

The light outside flared up, died down, and came again, as though the chapel were surrounded by an assemblage holding torches—an assemblage from which the saints in the windows seemed to shrink. The heavy door opened noiselessly, and the bride entered and advanced slowly up the aisle. She was

tall and gaunt, but I could not see her face because of the bridal veil.

Then I saw that the bridegroom was waiting for her at the chancel rail. He, also, was tall; a man of commanding figure, of a graceful presence. But he was strangely dressed for a bridegroom, since he wore a mask and domino of black. He was not Etienne.

The glare died down, every object grew dim, I could scarcely see. I could not hear the words of the service because of the organ that suddenly pealed forth—no wedding march, but a requiem for the dead. A great horror came upon me, I tried to get to the door to escape. I was too late. The bridal pair—now man and wife—had turned, were coming down the aisle.

I drew back into the pew. The bridegroom left his bride, approached, put out his hand, and strove to take my pearls from about my throat. I would not give them up. I struggled, I tried to cry out, to say that they were mine, should remain mine, always. To escape the gleaming eyes that stared at me through the mask, I looked back at the bride. Ah! her veil had turned into a shroud. She drew it slowly, so slowly, aside, laying, at the same time, an awful bony hand upon the shoulder of her bridegroom. With a moan of horror, I awoke, for the bride—was Death!

I sat up in bed and looked fearfully about me, dreading lest I might find myself still in the chapel. The great room was full of dusky shadows; they lurked in the corners, folded themselves about the grim mahogany furniture, wrapped all the familiar objects around me in a mysterious gloom. The tall cheval-glass only had caught the first faint light of the coming day, and held it reflected in its depths.

Suddenly I had the disagreeable feeling that I was not alone; that someone was in hiding among the

shadows. I held myself very still, and listened. It seemed to me that that other who occupied the room with me held his breath, too—and listened. The strain upon my nerves became too great. I spoke:

"Who is there?"

No answer. But did I hear a rustle, as though that someone were crouching down into a deeper quiet?

In desperate haste I struck a match, and lighted the candle on the table beside my bed. Then, at risk of setting fire to the rose-strewn hangings, held it above my head and peered about me. Did I imagine it, or was there someone hiding behind the cheval-glass? It stood well out in the room, between the fireplace and the eastern window. I slipped from my bed, went quickly to it, paused, saw my own white reflection dimly in the large mirror, looked behind. There was no one there.

As I turned I heard an odd sound in my dressing-room; yet I dared not leave the bedroom to investigate further until I was sure that it was empty. What if someone were left behind? I lifted the valance of the old four-post bedstead, looked under the tables, into the ponderous mahogany wardrobe—not a soul. The candle's feeble glimmer was reflected in mirrors and highly polished furniture, and as I moved cautiously hither and thither, it seemed to make the shadows deeper, instead of driving them away.

At last on into the dressing-room; but it, too, proved to be empty. Sighing with relief, I went back to bed, thankful that I had not cried out, in my terror, to Etienne. I was ashamed that a nightmare should have so fired my imagination, for I decided that I had imagined all the sounds. To sleep again, however, proved impossible, since I must needs fall to thinking of Etienne and the woman he loved. And when these bitter musings had been overcome, I began to wonder about the curious echo, called the Portent. It

was heard so seldom; rarely could the atmosphere be in the right condition to bring it. Then I speculated upon the equally curious desire of every Braithe to ignore both sound and superstition; a wish so generally known that I had been asked no questions about Lilian's fainting fit when I returned to my guests. Everyone had, apparently, forgotten the strange ending of the tableau; had forgotten everything, save the need of great effort on their part to act as though nothing had happened.

I had, in my thoughts, travelled far from my past terrors, when a low knock at my door brought them rushing back. The room was light, the day had come; yet my heart thumped uncomfortably as, slipping on my dressing-gown, I answered the summons. To my surprise, I found Mr. Brace, looking very grave, standing at the threshold. He made no idle apology, but going straight to the point, asked if I would go to the brick-yards with him to see a poor woman who was dying and wished for me.

I dressed hastily, then sought my purse. Thanks to Etienne's liberality, I might now really assist the poor. With a feeling of warm gratitude toward the giver, I opened my handsome pocket-book, thinking to lighten it before putting it in my pocket. It was generally overfull. To my surprise it was empty. Instantly I thought of the odd sounds I had heard but an hour before, then laughed at my foolish fears. Lilian had asked for money but the day previous, and must have helped herself more greedily than usual, that was all. Fortunately I had foreseen just such an emergency and had, always, a small private hoard.

As I tucked it into my purse, Hervey came to my door with a tray, on which was a glass of milk and a roll. He put it down on the table with an air of sodden resignation.

"The table is spread
With a hunk of bread,
And milk from the beastly cow,"

he said, sadly, misquoting as usual, "but I can't do better for you, Mrs. Rappelle. The cook is a swearing slug-in-bed this morning—he refuses to rise."

"You look tired out, Hervey," I said, surveying the little man with some anxiety, for his usually rosy face was pale, and his eyes were red. "Didn't you get any sleep?"

He shook his head gently, his bloodshot eyes fixed upon me with an expression of dog-like affection, the accustomed deprecatory smile about his pale lips.

"My brain had murdered sleep," he said, quietly, and I thought he was alluding to the wearisome old legend; that he, too, imagined that one of the Braithes was summoned, when he continued, "I heard the trailing garments of night thieves scraping along the walls —or thought I did, Mrs. Rappelle."

"Did you get up to look for them, Hervey?" I asked, in some excitement.

"Yes, madam. Mr. Fayne was of the same opinion—we met by chance, the ugliest way."

"You saw no one?" I questioned, eagerly.

"No one, Mrs. Rappelle."

I was very much relieved to be thus assured that my fears had been imaginary. "Try to sleep now, Hervey," I urged. "You have time for a nap before breakfast."

"Time is made for slaving, Mrs. Rappelle," he answered, gravely. "Many a grain of mustard seed would fall on the sideboard, were I to fold my talents in the napkins." And he went quietly away.

I found Mr. Brace waiting for me at the boat-house, and we glided out upon a river that seemed but a shield of gold, so dazzlingly did it reflect the sun's rays. No air was stirring, and I thought with

intense pity of the suffering creature, who was struggling for breath in the hot tenement, under the river bank near the brick-yard.

It was too quiet, unnaturally so; and when, at one o'clock, Mr. Brace and I re-entered our boat and started for home, the character of the day had changed. A wild breeze was tearing up the river from the southwest, whipping its heretofore smooth surface into white-capped waves, and driving masses of black, vaporous clouds across the heavens. Behind the western hills there curved upward a sheet of steely gray, whose sinister surface was rent, now and again, by jagged spears of lightning. Mr. Brace bent to his oars with a will and, since wind and tide were with us, we were swept along in a way that was exhilarating.

"We shan't be able to make the boat-house, Mrs. Rappelle," he shouted, raising his voice to dominate the noise of the approaching tempest. "Shall I land below the chapel? We can find shelter there."

I nodded. I liked the wild warring of wind and water, the beauty of the great tossing river, and its enemy—the on-coming storm demon. Mr. Brace could think only of the real peril of the moment, and heaved a deep sigh of relief when he at last drove the boat ashore, and, scrambling out, dragged it far up beneath the bank whose summit, high above us, was crowned by Braithe Chapel, with its surrounding graves. Refusing to allow me time to survey the magnificence of the scene, he seized my hand and pulled me up the bluff at a tremendous pace.

Laughing, protesting, begging for just one moment to look over my shoulder at the river, already far below us, I was forced to scramble on beside the usually mild-mannered little man, of whose latent energy I had been only half aware, and not until we had almost reached the chapel did the storm break. Then, thanks to the huge trees, beneath whose protecting

branches rested the dead and gone Braithes, hardly a drop of rain touched us, and, by running, we were in the little vestry—entering by the side door, of which Mr. Brace kept the key—before the downpour beat upon the chapel roof.

The heat in the little church was intense, as the rapidly cooling temperature outside had not, as yet, had time to penetrate its thick walls. I was surprised to see Mr. Brace resume his coat—which he had discarded while rowing—directly upon entering; but he announced his intention of going to the house at once, to give news of my whereabouts. It was in vain that I remonstrated—the storm was very fearful.

"Mr. Rappelle and the child will be painfully anxious," said the headstrong little man, turning up the collar of his coat as he spoke. "I could not reconcile it with my conscience, Mrs. Rappelle, to leave them in uncertainty." And bidding me lock the door after him, he went out into the tempest.

The tiny vestry was close to suffocation, and, hoping to find more air, I left it, and went to my accustomed seat in the great square family pew. Never at any time a very cheerful little church—although Etienne had done his best, when restoring it, to give an air of lightness to the sombre interior—the intense blackness of the storm added to its gloom. Memories of the scene enacted so short a time before, at the bedside of the dying woman, filled my mind with sad thoughts. I shuddered at each crash of thunder and looked, with awe-struck eyes, at the pictured saints of the stained-glass windows, standing out with almost life-like vividness under the fierce blue glare of the lightning. They reminded me of the terrors of the previous night, and of my awful dream. Falling upon my knees, I lost myself in prayer until a heavy sigh, echoing through the vaulted building, roused me in affright from my devotions.

Lifting my head I stared about me, at the same time telling myself that I must have mistaken some outside sound—the wailing of the wind through the branches of the old sycamores and walnut trees, or the cry of some distant steam-whistle upon the river—for the sigh of a human being. I had fastened the door of the vestry after Mr. Brace's exit, and the heavy front door of the chapel was always kept securely locked; the key hidden carefully in a certain place beneath the stone steps, known only to Lilian, Etienne, Mr. Brace, and me—a secret well guarded by us all, because of the tramps and river-thieves who would gladly have used the chapel for sleeping quarters.

I felt certain that no one could have entered, yet in spite of this I looked about me nervously. Because of the heavy gloom I could scarcely see more than the outlines of the pew, but the church seemed empty; and I had almost recovered my tranquillity, when a vivid flash of lightning illuminated every object within the walls. Then I saw, with a sensation of horror that was an agony, a masked man standing near the entrance door. He wore a slouched hat pulled well forward, but not far enough to hide his eyes, that gleamed through the slits of his mask like the eyes of the man in my dream. I dared neither cry out, nor move. My only hope was that he might not have seen me, yet I felt a sickening conviction that those awful eyes were fixed upon my pale face. It was all over in an instant, the glare being followed by intense darkness—more intense because of that moment of light.

I rose cautiously. I must get to the vestry while the darkness held. I clung to the hope that I was still unseen. I had no superstitious fears to combat, I knew that the man was no spectre, yet because of my dream his masked face well-nigh paralyzed me with terror, adding to the unreality of my surround-

ings. Before I could reach the door of the pew—moving so slowly on leaden feet of fear—there came another flash of lightning, accompanied by a deafening peal of thunder. I crouched down instantly upon the floor. I held my breath—was someone stealthily approaching, up the aisle?

The thunder rumbled away in the distance, following, as if in sport, the mountains which almost encircle that part of the river. Even in my dreadful anxiety my mind reverted to the old legend, told all children who live among the highlands of our river, of Hendrick Hudson playing at nine-pins with his crew of the Half-moon, in some hidden hollow of the Kaatskill Mountains.

A deep sigh, almost a groan, again echoed through the church. My heart seemed to stand still. Then, in desperation, I unfastened the little door of the pew and ran trembling, stumbling through the gloom, past the chancel steps to the vaulted entrance of the vestry. As I hastened to close and bolt the door, the chapel was again filled with blue light; the figures in the windows seemed to take life and move. But stare as I might I saw them alone—the masked man was gone.

There came a loud knocking from without.

"Dolly!" cried an anxious voice, Herbert's, "Dolly, open the door! Let me in!"

I could not obey him fast enough. And when he entered, wet through and much concerned about me, I forgot his past misconduct and met him with both hands outstretched.

"O Bertie," I cried, breathlessly, "there's a masked man in the church! What shall we do?"

Herbert drew me to him, stooping to look into my face. "A man in a mask, Dolly? How can that be? There, don't be frightened; it's all right now."

"No, no, Herbert," I protested, "it's not all right

while he's there. I tell you I saw him plainly. Tall, and——"

"I'll go look for him," he said, interrupting me. "You wait here, dear, and I'll search every corner."

The thunder was still booming like heavy cannon, too near us for comfort, and the accompanying flashes of lightning made me wince.

"What was that?" I cried, as there came a heavier crash than before. "Did I hear the big door closing, Herbert?"

"No, no, Dolly," he said, soothingly; but it seemed to my overstrained nerves that a sneer lurked beneath the softness of his tones. "Your imagination runs away with you, dear."

His words, the intonation of his voice, the tender pressure of his fingers closed fast over mine, brought me to my senses. I was ashamed that my terror had made me forget everything save the desire for protection. I drew my hands from his, and going to the door leading into the body of the church, unlocked and opened it.

"I will help you look," I said.

But Herbert drew me back, almost roughly, and pushed me into a chair. "No," he said, decidedly, "you must stay here. I prefer to go alone." And he closed the door behind him as he went.

I was not alone long, for before he had returned Hervey came in, laden down with wraps.

"Dear lady!" he cried, hovering about me. "Absence make the heart to ponder, and I've thought with anxiety of you all the long, long, dreary day."

He knelt down to put on my overshoes, and as he did so Herbert came back. Hervey started, and looked up quickly. "Mr. Fayne!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "You sought refuge by the front way?"

"No, Merle." Then to me: "It's all right, Dolly," and he laid his finger on his lips, in token that Hervey

—again bending over my feet—was not to know of my fear.

In this I acquiesced, since had I really been the victim of my too vivid imagination—as I began to believe had been the case—of what use to worry others?

"Mr. Brace did not mention having met you, sir," said Hervey, jealous of Herbert having been the first to reach me I thought.

"No," said Herbert, good-humoredly, "but I got anxious about Mrs. Rappelle, Merle, seeing your master wasn't at home, so I was hurrying down to have a look for her when I met the little parson heading for the house on the dead run. He was going at such a pace—head down, butting at the rain like a mad bull —that he never saw me!"

Hervey gave vent to a low "Humph!"

"Where is Mr. Rappelle?" I asked.

"Gone with Mr. Fadd to Hilltown," said Herbert, quickly. And I saw him touch Hervey's foot—as if by accident—with his own.

"Hervey," I said, very gently, "you may tell me at once what has happened."

"Dolly!" cried Herbert, as if in protest.

Hervey rose slowly to his feet and stood looking down at me, intense admiration and pride in his eyes. "Fools would step in to teach angels where to tread," he said, softly, as if to himself, then, "All are well, dear lady, so wipe, oh, wipe, that fear away!"

"Thank God!" I murmured, having ever in mind the fragile health of little Jane. "What is it then, Hervey, please? I don't mind anything else."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Rappelle," said Hervey, slowly shaking his head from side to side, "you are not one of those who lay up treasures for themselves where moth and ruffians congregate to help thieves break in and steal!"

"What is stolen?" I asked, rising in my excitement. "Tell me quickly, please."

"Every jewel in the house, Mrs. Rappelle," was the solemn answer.

"Then there was someone in my room this morning!" I exclaimed, "and you were right in thinking that you heard burglars. Oh, why didn't I call Etienne!"

"He might have been shot," said Herbert, sardonically, "and you would never have forgiven yourself—ah, pardon me, Dolly!" as I colored hotly with indignation, "I didn't think what I was saying." Then, lowering his voice so that Hervey, who had gone to look at the weather, might not hear, "I am half mad, I think." I moved quickly toward the door. "Dolly!" he cried, under his breath, "Dolly! one moment, just one—I must speak to you alone.

His eyes glowed into mine, he laid his hand on my arm to detain me. I shook it off with tired impatience. I wanted to get rid of him, to be at home, where I must be needed. I was indignant that he should wish to detain me with his strange folly at such a time. I knew that Etienne would feel greatly distressed that such an occurrence had taken place beneath his roof. He had probably gone to Hilltown to notify the police. Again I had missed seeing Dr. Strong's interesting friend, who must have been at Braithe when the robbery was discovered. Upon questioning Hervey I found that such had been the case.

"The early bird catches the worst, Mrs. Rappelle," said Hervey, gravely, "like you and this professor this self-same morning. The danger is past now, I think," waving his hand toward the sky, "but the rain has come to stay."

Understanding this to mean that I might start for home, I hurried there as quickly as possible; the swift-

ness of my pace preventing Herbert from forcing a tête-à-tête. I found Mrs. Love flitting restlessly about the hall, evidently waiting for me. She ran up and helped me off with my cloak.

"I am so very, very sorry," I said, looking at her anxiously, "have you lost your trinkets, Mrs. Love?"

She shook her mop of curls violently. "Nothing worth taking, my dear, so don't fret about me."

"Ah, how glad I am!" I exclaimed. "But the others? I fear they are taking their loss very hard."

"You bet!" was the characteristic answer. "Rachel mourning for her children wasn't in the running for a minute. Every precious one of them doing the Niobe act for all they're worth—and they're not worth much, to tell the awful truth, when their finery's torn off them!" she giggled, wickedly. "And Bandhar's the worst of the lot!"

"Mrs. Allenby's gems?" I gasped, suddenly remembering her almost priceless collection.

"All gone," said Mrs. Love; "she'd rather have lost her daughters. There, don't look so awfully careworn! It's not your fault. You are certainly the sweetest, most sympathetic thing alive!"

"Oh, hush!" I cried, catching her hand in mine. "Please don't pay me compliments just now, Mrs. Love."

She patted my cheek, and surveyed me with great complacency; then stooped and kissed me, at the same time patting Hervey's topknot gently—he was on his knees taking off my overshoes, but had paused in his task to listen to her.

"You see," she said, "my beautiful girl—your cheeks are just like wet rose leaves—I'm not down on my luck because the one jewel I care about is your opal. And that, thanks to your sister's carelessness, is lost out of harm's way."

"Like a peach in a pig's snout," grumbled Hervey, but so low that I could pretend not to have heard.

"But come, Mrs. Theo," continued Mrs. Love, "you'd better run upstairs before you're caught. Come," grasping my hand and pulling me to my feet, "get to your dressing-room, and get your second wind before you face the foe."

"Yes, dear lady," urged Hervey, "remember there's no one, as Mrs. Love says, so much to be feared as the fools in your own household."

But I disregarded Mrs. Love's well-meant counsel, preferring instead to go to the drawing-room, from whence came the confused murmur of many voices. Herbert was in the library at the telephone, in communication with Etienne, having gone there directly upon our return to the house. When I entered Mr. Bandhar was standing before the fireplace over which hung my portrait, dominating the others through superior power of lungs—or inferior habits of civility.

"I know what I'm talking about, I tell you," he bawled with ponderous insistency, "somebody inside let 'em in. I don't approve of encouragin' the lower orders to such an extent as is done here. That feller Merle is too damn free in his manners, altogether."

"Whom do you suspect, Mr. Bandhar?" I asked, coming forward.

He wagged his head at me solemnly, too much upset by the loss of his ornaments to realize how exceedingly rude he had been. "I name no names in public," he replied, with an air that said he could, an' he would, put his finger on the guilty party, "but when the police arrive I'll tell them. Mrs. Rappelle"—there came into his voice the sound of repressed tears—"I've lost all my scarf-pins, yes, all, every one! I remember you remarked once that the cat's-eye set in diamonds was a beauty. The emerald four-leafed clover with large, very large, diamond dew-drop, you said

became me. Well, well, I fear you'll never see me in 'em again!"

I asked for Mrs. Allenby and was told that she was upstairs.

"Mrs. Allenby," said Major O'Leary, as grave as a deacon for the first time since his arrival at Braithe, "Mrs. Allenby"—he lowered his voice to an impressive whisper—"is suffering from a severe nervous headache. The shock has been too much for her. Pray believe, Mrs. Rappelle, that she realizes, as do we all, how very, ah—unpleasant, this affair must be for our admirable host and charming hostess," bowing low. "And we also realize how deeply you, too, must be suffering from your own part of the loss. Those magnificent diamonds! That marvellous string of pearls!"

Saying that I would go upstairs to see Mrs. Allenby, I left the room, and ran against Herbert in the hall.

"Rappelle won't be home for luncheon, Dolly," he said, looking worried. "He has telegraphed to New York for detectives, and they're to be here by dinner time. Where are you going?"

"Upstairs," I said, coldly, and then, thinking aloud, added, "I wish Mr. Bandhar didn't suspect the servants!"

"Bandhar's a fool," said Herbert, with irritated disgust. "But it's going to be a beastly business all through. I'm sorry about your baubles, Dolly."

"Oh, never mind about them," I said, impatiently.

"You think that Rappelle is sure to give you more?" he sneered, then, seeing my face clouding with disapproval, he changed his tone. "Forgive me," he said, humbly, "I'm ashamed of myself, Dolly. Don't worry about the servants. I'll make it all right for them by suggesting that every trunk in the house be searched. The police shall begin on mine."

I did not thank him, he had tried me too sorely. I went on upstairs.

Mrs. Allenby, pleading the necessity for quiet, would not receive me; so I betook myself to my own room, in hopes of a breathing spell. But there I found Lilian and Josette, engaged in a dispute so violent that the former had lost her dignity, and the latter the respect due her employer's sister. Josette, weeping, poured out her story first; since Lilian, at sight of me, assumed a haughty attitude, and took refuge in what might be called a sneering silence.

The cause of the quarrel was the theft of my jewels. Josette declared that she had, acting in obedience to Lilian's orders, left them in Lilian's care, she having said that she would herself take charge of them, after the tableaux. Lilian, on her part, denied this, saying that she had, at the end of the evening, placed my jewel box in Josette's hands. Here Josette interrupted to insist that the box had not been brought downstairs, but left in Lilian's room.

"I fancy my sister will hardly take your word before mine," sneered Lilian, "A mere servant, a greedy Swiss!"

"Where is madame's opal, then?" flashed out Josette. "That was left in the careful keeping of mademoiselle, if I mistake not! Has it ever been restored to madame?"

To my surprise I saw that she hated Lilian. I never would have suspected that my gentle little maid could show such fierceness. As for Lilian, she grew pale with fury.

"Don't listen to her, Theo!" she cried. "A lying, time-serving little cat! How dare she insinuate such dreadful things, how dare you stand and listen to her? I never touched your hateful gems—I'll bet they're nothing but paste, anyway—and you know I lost the

opal. Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do? Insulted by a vile maid-servant."

It was some time before I could stem the flood of angry words that poured in musical tones from her white lips. When I had imposed silence, I chose my rôle with care. It was a difficult one to select, since I knew that Lilian was not telling the truth. No, her sneers when she thought she might escape detection and her following angry asseverations of innocence, mingled—as always—with denunciations of her chosen victim, told me but too plainly that she was the one to blame. Lilian, the woman, had the same peculiarities as Lilian, the child. It was for me to protect her from the consequences of her own fault.

"Try to compose yourself, Lilian," I said. "And you, Josette, will remember that what is said in anger is often only half meant. Miss Lilian, I am sure, will be sorry later if she hurts your feelings; while you, I know, will bitterly regret any disrespect shown on your own part."

"Quite true, dear, dear madame," sobbed the poor girl.

"As for you, Lilian," I said, suavely, "no one can expect you to recollect what you did, or said, after your nervous attack of last evening. You were unconscious for some time."

"So I was," she exclaimed, grasping with eagerness, as I had expected, at this chance of escape afforded her. "So I was, Theo! As you say, I was not quite myself after that terrible fainting fit. Oh, my poor head," she passed her hand with affected weariness across her forehead, "it really pains me yet! Josette, I must have forgotten to carry Madame Rappelle's diamonds and pearls upstairs with me. Yes, I distinctly remember now, just laying them down on a little table and meaning to go back for them—yes,

that was what I did. The thieves must have found them there."

Josette sullenly accepted this half apology. I suggested a thorough search for the opal among Lilian's effects, saying that that probably was safe enough.

"No, madame," said Josette, "the opal, too, is gone. Mademoiselle's maid and I have done our possible—not once, but many times. I would not tell madame before; I had not the heart."

Lilian's brows drew together in a threatening frown; another outburst of anger was, I saw, imminent. Josette had taken a liberty in searching her room.

I gave Lilian a warning glance. "What is lost, is lost," I said, sadly, for I loved my opal almost as much as though it had been a live thing—it had once grown warm against my mother's breast. "Come, Lilian! They must be waiting for us in the dining-room."

They were waiting. As unhappy and hungry a set of people—Hervey informed me—as had ever collected around the Braithe dining-table. I knew better, but I did not contradict him. "Yet eat, drink, and be merry, dear lady," he whispered, as I took my place, "since none of 'em will die!"

They were happier when, late in the afternoon, Etienne returned accompanied by a brace of detectives—New York men—and a policeman from Hilltown, loaned him for a few days by the town authorities.

"Only one policeman!" mourned Mr. Bandhar. "Only two detectives! Well, I shall sit up all night."

"What for, you goose?" asked Mrs. Love; "I thought your gimcracks were all stolen!"

"Never you mind why," he said, solemnly, "only I ain't quite a fool."

"Dear me, no! Of course not," was the saucy answer.

XXIII

The dinner that evening proved a very disagreeable function. Mrs. Allenby, hearing of the arrival of the detectives, forgot her headache and came downstairs. She had always been so exceptionally agreeable, showing so much tact on every occasion where social skill was needed, that it was a shock to find that her fine manners were but a veneering. This was now cracked by the loss of her jewels into unsightly rifts, through which her real nature was plainly to be seen. She had become ill-tempered, sneering, even rude. Mrs. Ainslie, Mr. Carrington, and the Loves behaved as usual. Everybody else was cross and unpleasant.

I, too, felt cross, and much inclined to be disagreeable. I had had a hard day. I was very tired. My beautiful pearls, my sparkling diamonds, were gone—yet nobody seemed to care!

As I looked across the table at Etienne my indignation deepened, for although he had been politely attentive when I spoke of my morning at the brickyard, and had shown much interest when I told of the masked man in the chapel, he had offered no sympathy. All his care seemed to be for his guests. Bent upon restoring their lost valuables, I, and my affairs, were apparently of little account. The anxiety he had shown the night before had vanished. The daylight had evidently dispelled his superstitious dread of—and belief in—the Death Coach. This indifference irritated me. I said to myself that since he was not interested in what concerned me, I might

as well divert myself by saying and doing what I chose—and I chose to be unpleasant.

I thought a moment, then selecting the remark most likely to prove an apple of discord to my trying guests, an apple of Sodom to my inattentive husband, tossed it lightly across the table to the latter.

"Etienne," I said, looking dreamily at him, "I'm so sorry not to have met Mr. Fadd—I do long to meet somebody really interesting, somebody with a mind! When was he to leave Dr. Strong's?"

"This afternoon, Theo."

"Mrs. Strong said he was occult," I went on, as though thinking aloud. "I always thought I would like to marry an occult man—not an elderly one, though. A young occult."

I had chosen a moment when conversation languished in which to launch this missile. It certainly served to rouse the attention of the company, and to divert their minds from their own woes. Mrs. Allenby laughed disagreeably.

"You may have a chance yet, Mrs. Rappelle," she said. "*Qui sait?*"

Etienne's eyes flashed—my existence was remembered. "Don't sign my death-warrant, Mrs. Allenby," he said, a little too suavely. "I have yet some years ahead of me, I trust, in which to learn the full meaning of the word 'occult.' "

"Unless some other chap cuts you out," bawled Mr. Bandhar. "Death ain't the only way of breaking marriage bonds nowadays," and he winked hideously at me behind Mrs. Allenby's back.

"No," said Herbert, his eyes cast down, "there are other ways—fortunately—in which the imprisoned may find freedom."

"Only sometimes they find they ain't quite so free as they thought they were going to be!" said Mr. Bandhar, revenging himself for several ill-tempered

speeches from Mrs. Allenby. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip—what do you say, O'Leary?"

The unfortunate major, turning purple, buried his nose in his glass of Burgundy, and pretended not to hear.

As for me, with raised brows and eyes dilated by surprise, I looked in apparent bewilderment from one to the other, as if unable to understand what the sudden turmoil meant. In short, I behaved just as badly as I possibly could.

"I'm afraid I have been rude!" I said, as though in sudden alarm, looking at Etienne with feigned anxiety. "What did I say, Etienne?"

"Nothing of any importance, my dear," was the smiling reply—I was pleased to see that his temper was roused—"you merely regretted your choice of a husband!" He spoke as though jesting, and every one, save myself, was deceived.

"Choice!" sneered Herbert, under his breath.

"What did you say, Bertie?" I asked. Since Etienne was so blind in regard to Herbert's true character, I would do my duty—and open his eyes.

"Do you really care to hear?" said Herbert, looking steadily at me.

Mrs. Love and Lilian began to talk, as though moved by a common impulse to relegate Mr. Fayne and his remark to the background. Etienne, I saw, was watching me with an interest that he tried to conceal. I answered my cousin with gay nonsense.

"No, Alcibiades," I said, smiling, my finger upon my lips, "you had best keep silent."

"I will tell you later, Dolly," he said, his splendid eyes glowing with sudden excitement.

"Meet me by moonlight alone! Is that your game?" demanded Mr. Bandhar. "Say, when you're sentimental you're sickenin', do you know it?" In

his effort to drown the memory of his lost scarf-pins, Mr. Bandhar had indulged far too freely in his favorite beverage, champagne. His frankness of speech grew more appalling every moment. "What do you mean by calling him," he continued, pointing a rude finger at Herbert, "Alcibiades, Mrs. Rappelle? Sounds like a dog."

"Give a dog a bad name and—hang him!" I said, laughing. Then, holding my glass high, I cried, "Here's long life to the gallows!"

Mr. Bandhar's heavy laugh boomed through the room. Everyone else smiled politely, as in duty bound, while staring at me in evident amazement. At this moment carriage wheels were heard on the avenue. Everybody started; uneasy glances were exchanged; Lilian grew deathly pale.

"Only the arrival of our evening's amusement," said Etienne, hastily, in explanation. "I thought we all needed something new to distract our minds, so I engaged a palmist to come up from town to read our hands."

"Who is he?" cried Mabel Allenby, delighted by the prospect.

"A gentleman," said Etienne, smiling, "who prefers not to have his name known. He is an amateur, but, I am told, a marvel in his way; even the best professionals yield the palm—I don't intend a pun—to him."

"Do we know him?"

"Does he know us?"

Everybody demanded both questions, in chorus.

Etienne shook his head.

"He asked to be given the names of my guests before he consented to come," he said, gravely. "I talked with him through the telephone. He does not care to read the palms of his acquaintances; they bore him by insisting that he is prejudiced when he tells

them pleasant—or unpleasant—things. He prefers using his skill for strangers."

"What fun it will be to meet him to-morrow, when the mischief's done!" said Mrs. Ainslie.

"I am very sorry," said Etienne, "but he prefers not to meet anyone socially. And I am to tell you all," he added, glancing quickly at me, "that your characters will be quite safe in his hands, since he never reveals professional secrets. A priest in the confessional is not more to be trusted than he."

"Poor man!" I exclaimed, "he has chosen a dull *métier*. Fancy learning the secrets of a host of stupid people, without having the amusement of gossiping about them afterward! Let us hope that someone among us has a nature sufficiently baffling, in its complexity, to give him the tang of excitement that he must long for."

"Human riddles are not so rare as you seem to think, Theo," said Etienne, quietly. "Doubtless he will find plenty here to read."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Bandhar, wagging his head with great seriousness, "he'll have to put on his spectacles when he looks at my hand, I guess. Lots of girls have made an awful bungle over it already."

Our guests were so anxious to have their palms read by Trismegistus—as Herbert dubbed the mysterious stranger—and so eager, on their return, to find an attentive listener to whom to confide the story of their horrible, delightful, or disappointing interview, that it was late when I, the last of all save Etienne, entered the library.

I found that the room had been well arranged to impress the uninitiated. The portrait of my great-great-great-grandfather was hidden by a curtain of dull red silk, all save the eyes; they watched one's every movement, gleaming through openings made in the silk. In front of the fireplace, on a high teak-

wood stand, was a bronze Buddha, seated upon his lotus-flower. Before the god, on the same stand, stood a bowl in the shape of the lotus—dull pink petals curving upward in a cup. This was filled with fragrant oil, in which floated a lighted taper.

The evening breeze, stealing in through the turned swivels of the blinds, made the little flame flicker, casting a gigantic shadow of the Buddha upon the ceiling, and giving a lifelike expression to the watchful eyes of the veiled portrait.

In a corner of the large room two screens were arranged to form an alcove, in which, seated cross-legged upon a pile of dull green cushions, was enshrined the palmist. Before him stood a low table of teak-wood, provided with a small cushion of black velvet on which the seeker after self-knowledge was to place his, or her, hand. The palmist wore a loose silk robe the colors of the lotus—the dull pink of its flowers, lined with the soft green of its leaves. This was richly embroidered in green and silver, in an intricate pattern formed of wreaths and bunches of the lotus, and fastened about the waist by what looked like an uprooted lily; its shining snake-like stem coiled around him, its pink flower hanging, as a tassel, in front. On his head was a close-fitting skullcap of the same design; an inverted lotus-flower.

The man was as strange looking as his costume; but this was owing to his expression, and not to any peculiarity of feature. His brown hair was nearly concealed by the cap; his eyebrows were finely marked, level, and intensely black. From beneath them a pair of marvellous gray eyes looked out upon the world with the patient acceptance of its pettiness—yet, withal, the kindly interest—that belongs to those who have acquired wisdom through a long study of its peoples, and their widely divergent ways. His face was clean shaven, his upper lip very long; the nose

straight, but a trifle broad; the mouth of the flexible kind that changes shape constantly.

He sat as quiet as the Buddha; looking as though having kept that position through many centuries, he was prepared to remain thus placed until the end of time. I did not at first see him very distinctly, as the only light in the room, besides the feeble taper, was a lamp on a stand near the teak-wood table, so arranged, with its thick shade of some dull stuff, that its glow fell upon the little velvet cushion, and left the occupant of the niche in shadow. But if his pose belonged to the Orient, his wonderful eyes were Anglo-Saxon, and he kept them fixed upon me as I moved slowly toward him up the long room. I searched rapidly through my memory for a suitable phrase of welcome, and sweeping a deep courtesy when still at a respectful distance from his shrine said, while I looked down modestly:

"O most illustrious of the disciples of Budd, O Elephant among Palmists, accept the ardent admiration of the humblest among thy votaries! Gladly would I perform a pradakshina around thee, were I sure that so poor a thing as woman could be allowed to celebrate that graceful ceremony of respect—or if the narrow limits of thy shrine would permit of its execution."

He answered me in kind. "Many have knelt before this poor table of teak-wood," he said, in a voice so sweet yet vibrant that listening became a pleasure, "but to kneel is not fitting for one who is at once the Diamond, the Ruby, the Pearl, and the Opal among women—the most beautiful of all the Daughters of Earth! Before thee, even the Heaven-born must veil their faces! Be seated, O Rose in bloom."

An oddly shaped teak-wood seat was in front of the table, and I placed myself as desired. I wore the gown trimmed with peacocks' feathers of jet. This

was to please little Josette, who, having repaired it with marvellous cleverness, wished me to show appreciation of her efforts. Naturally I disliked the frock with its memories. High up on the left side of the low corsage, so that they rested against my shoulder, my maid had pinned three very perfect red roses. These had, I fancied, provided the palmist with his last flower of speech, for looking up after I had seated myself I saw that his eyes were upon them.

"Roses please thee, O King among Sages?" I inquired, respectfully.

"They should, O large-eyed Lady," was the picturesque response, "since we learn in the Pervigilium Veneris that they are made from the blood of Venus, from buds and breezes, from radiant sunbeams—and the kisses of love."

"And that poor thing, Woman, O Giant among Prophets," I inquired, humbly, "dost thou deign to cast thy piercing eyes tolerantly upon Woman?"

The piercing eyes sparkled with what looked like merriment, but the repose of face and figure remained unaltered as he answered, gravely:

"Know then, O Lady of the radiant smile, that it is said that after the creation of man no solid elements were left; so, after profound meditation, the Great One took the rotundity of the Moon, and the curves of Creepers; the clinging of Tendrils, and the trembling of Grass; the slenderness of the Reed, and the bloom of Flowers; the lightness of Leaves, and the tapering of the Elephant's trunk; the glances of the Deer; the clustering of rows of Bees; the joyous gayety of Sunbeams, and the weeping of Clouds; the fickleness of the Winds; the timidity of the Hare; the vanity of the Peacock"—I covered the jetted feathers on my breast with both hands, and smiled deprecatingly at the palmist—"the softness of the Parrot's bosom," he went on, speaking impressively, "with the hardness of Ada-

mant; the sweetness of Honey, with the cruelty of the Tiger; the warm glow of Fire, and the coldness of Snow; the chattering of Jays, and the cooing of the Kokila"; he stopped speaking a long moment, then continued, "the hypocrisy of the Crane—the fidelity," again he paused, "of the Chakrawaka. And, compounding all these together, he made—Woman!"

"Yet she pleased—Man!" I said, thoughtfully.

"Yes, soft-voiced winner of Hearts," was the answer, "and displeased him. First he would keep her, then would none of her; at last he said, 'O Lord, what is to be done? I cannot live either with her—or without her!' "

"That was before other men peopled the earth," I said, slowly. "When others came he clung to the one he had chosen, lest they wrest from him the Delight of his Eyes—even were she not the Joy of his Heart."

"Of what use that I should look into the palm of this Student of Souls," exclaimed the palmist, "when she herself is a Reader of Thoughts!"

I laid my right hand, palm upward, upon the velvet cushion of the table before me. "Will the Wisest among Men deign to counsel the Ignorant?" I said, pleadingly.

"Thy voice," said the palmist, slowly, "thy smile, and thy beauty, surpass all voices, smiles, and beauty, that——"

"And my hand?" I interrupted.

He smiled, and his smile was charming, showing a row of the most perfect teeth; he bowed low, swaying forward in odd fashion.

"Thy right hand shows what thou thyself hast done," he said, suavely, "but I would read what thou wast before thy Soul and Strength rose up and took control, O deep-thinking Lady with the star-like eyes!"

Then I must needs lay both hands, palms downward, upon the cushion; afterward reversing their position. Silence reigned in the large room—a silence so profound that distant sounds of the gay talk in the drawing-room penetrated, and drew my thoughts from this strange man, who was scrutinizing my quiet hands as if they had been books of worth. I thought, with an ache in my heart, of Etienne, of his misplaced affection—but was it misplaced? And why, I asked myself, did I not rejoice, that the man whom I had feared might grow to love me, had given his heart elsewhere? This I could not understand; I ought to have been glad, yet—I was not. And I began to doubt if regret over his lost happiness, alone, could so discomfort me. Then the old worrying thoughts about Herbert swarmed back. I felt that Etienne ought to know of Herbert's ill-behavior. Yet how tell him? If he had cared for me it would have been so easy, but now, when he was all the time comparing me with that other woman—doubtless to my great disadvantage——

"Those who come to me doubting," said the palmist, breaking in upon my sad musings, "leave me believing."

He had finished his study of my hands, and swayed back into his former position of profound repose. It occurred to me that the poor man must be tired, he had read so many palms.

"Never mind about telling my fortune," I said, impulsively. "You are surely in need of rest. Let me get you something to refresh you after your labors. Will you choose what you would prefer, or may I have the pleasure of guessing your favorite dishes, and wine? Not," glancing, with a smile, at his lotus-strewn robe, "that I have it in my power to offer the viands to which you are probably accustomed."

"And what may they be?" he inquired.

I shook my head. "Some preparation of the lotus?" I suggested.

He smiled. Then, again becoming grave, he assured me that he was not tired, and began to describe my character very much as though he were reading it aloud from some book. Following my lead, as before, he dropped all Oriental imagery, and spoke plainly and decisively. As for me I sat astounded, listening to a strangely correct description of myself; of my mind, heart, temperament, beliefs, virtues—faults. Naturally, he made this as flattering as he could, yet I found it not a little trying that a stranger should thus hold the secrets of my very soul itself.

"You are not superstitious," he continued, "so a glimpse into futurity would not affect you. But your nature is intensely religious. Although you believe it cannot be done, the mere thought of lifting the veil offends you."

"Yes," I murmured, "that is quite true."

He sighed. It was as though he would have given me a hint of something important to come—of danger, perhaps—yet, because of a firm conviction that the beliefs of others should be respected, kept silence. "Superstition is to be dreaded," he said, slowly, "yet many so-called heathenish old superstitions have grown out of truths. I may say to you, who are a thinker, that it is unwise to be over quick in scorning the creeds of others. Those who are willing to sift the sayings of the primitive, of the ignorant, find some gems of price."

I was reminded of my opal. I told the palmist of its loss, and, thinking to turn the conversation into what I considered its proper channel, asked, jestingly, if I should find it. "I was born in October," I added, "perhaps you believe that it is a lucky jewel—for me."

"It is a strange gem," was the grave answer. "The

Turks believe that it falls from heaven in the lightning's flash; that it is the abode of afrites and genii, since by its colors it suggests the glories of paradise. They invest it with talismanic properties."

The flickering light of the taper, in its fragrant oil, made the great shadow of the Buddha on the ceiling appear to nod. The lamp on the stand near me had begun to grow dim. I turned it higher. A few sparks flew upward from its wick, showing that it was nearly burned away. The stranger, leaning forward, turned it out. We were almost in darkness; the faint gleam of the taper before the bronze god alone remained to illuminate the large room.

"Listen," commanded the palmist, but in a low voice, as though fearing to be overheard, "your opal will be restored to you—but in what way you will have to choose. It is your natal stone: it stands for hope, innocence, purity! Rather than give up his opal, Nonius, the Roman senator, sought banishment. It was the size of a hazel-nut, and even in those days was valued at what we call one million dollars. Yet Marc Antony would have paid the price to have laid it at the feet of the Egyptian sorceress!" The breeze had died away, the tiny flame in the lotus burned steadily, the shadow on the ceiling seemed as if listening, too. "Marc Antony would have given the jewel of innocence, of purity, to her who had already destroyed—a pearl!" The shadow of the god appeared to start. I looked uneasily over my shoulder and saw two eyes watching me intently—the eyes of my ancestor. "The opal worn by the Empress Josephine," continued the palmist, "bore a strange name: *L'incendie de Troie.* It disappeared. When—who can say? Where is it—who can tell? Misfortune came; the opal was—lost."

There came a sharp knock at the door. I paid no heed—I must ask a question first. "My choice?" I

whispered, eagerly, "what is it to be? Between two miseries? Can I refuse this choice?"

I was strangely affected—carried away by a something, I did not know what, about this man. An air of strength, perhaps. Not strength of the body—but of the mind, of the soul. A feeling that he had sought, and found, not only wisdom, but, in it, peace.

The knocking was repeated. Then the door was abruptly opened. The shadow of the god flung itself across the length of the room, then, as the light from the hall rushed in, drew back—disappeared.

"The Buddha himself makes answer," said the palmist.

In the doorway stood Herbert and Etienne.

They brought me back to real life, for they said they were waiting for me—that supper was served.

XXIV

On my dressing-table the following morning I found a gift from the palmist. A fan—a strange one. It was arranged to hang from the belt by a slender snake of silver; so pliable, its scales so fitting into each other, that I could twist it this way and that at my ease. The reptile held the ring of the fan in its mouth; its tail was looped around the hook—a lotus leaf—that slipped inside my belt. The sticks of the fan were of ivory, the two outside ones heavily embossed with lotus-flowers of silver. The fan was large—of dull gray silk. On it was the picture of a pond about whose edges floated the lotus, in bloom. So cleverly was this painted, that as I waved the fan to and fro the water seemed to ripple, the flowers to sway, and deep in the heart of the little lake a face appeared—the face of the Buddha.

When not in motion the face, beneath its veil of rippling water, was hardly visible; the lilies were quiet, the water still.

Twisted between the sticks of the fan was a slip of paper on which was written, in flowing handwriting, these lines:

> **As weapon grave, as weapon gay**
> **(Or heart to save, or heart to slay),**
> **Hang at thy side, as sword, alway.**
> **(Need comes to-morrow, or—to-day?)**

Both fan and paper were heavy with the scent of sandal-wood.

As I looked admiringly at this evidence of the palmist's courtesy toward his hostess, the words of his verse

brought to my recollection the use to which my Scotch ancestress had put her fan when saving the life of the young Hungarian, the gypsy. Yet the palmist could never have heard this story! Then my mind reverted to the opal, to its strange disappearance, and the palmist's words about its recovery—and my choice. Scarce knowing that I did so, I again read his doggerel, and lifting it, held it between me and the light, idly wondering of what the odd silky paper on which it was written was made. To my surprise I saw that in the spaces between the lines of the verse there ran, in each, two other lines, written in very small but perfectly legible characters. This had been done with pale yellow ink.

Like subtle poison, sure if slow,
The Opal's vengeance follows on.

Grim Death will hail its twice-doomed foe
Ere thrice again has set the sun.

And ere thrice the sun has set
Comes thy choice—do not forget!

I smiled as I put the slip of paper away, amused by the would-be necromancer's effort to impress me. I promised myself that I would show the curious verse to Etienne, after our guests had left Braithe, and he was at leisure to think of me a little. That the palmist had succeeded in thoroughly interesting everybody, was proved by the conversation over the supper table. He had been voted a wonder by all—excepting Herbert, who declared that he had been told nothing of the least importance.

Since it was Sunday morning, I did not, at first, intend to wear my new ornament; but upon reflecting that were the palmist still at Braithe, he might feel hurt did I fail to show appreciation, I hung it at my side, as he had wished. It was wondered over, ad-

mired, pronounced a gem, by every woman in the house. Some were envious; others declared that it was uncanny, pointing out the lifelike sinuosity of the long silver snake, the odd watchful expression in the reptile's moonstone eyes, and the strange face—now hidden, now revealed—under the rippling water of the lotus pond. To Etienne alone the palmist's generosity seemed to give profound satisfaction.

The day was hot and sultry, with the promise of more thunder showers. There had been no good clearing after the heavy one of Saturday morning. The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive, very trying to those in delicate health. Poor little Jane looked so miserable that I coaxed her into the hammock with me after luncheon, when we had the rose-garden to ourselves, all our guests having gone to their own rooms for their usual siesta.

"How sweet you are in that black gauzy stuff, Theo!" said the child, pillowing her golden head on my shoulder. "Your arms and shoulders look lovely through it, so white and cool! I'd like to sleep a little, if it wouldn't tire you too much to hold me."

"Didn't you rest well last night, pet?" I asked, anxiously.

"Well enough, I guess," said the child, patting my cheek softly. "And, anyway, you're not to fret about me. There, let's sing each other to sleep and forget our troubles," and she began to croon a little French lullaby.

I was so tired that, although I had intended to keep awake and guard Janey's slumbers, I fell sound asleep. I was roused by hearing the child softly cautioning someone not to wake me.

"Hush!" she whispered, "she's asleep, poor thing. Don't she look lovely, just like a weary flower! But you sit down, close by me. Draw up that chair, so——"

"I'm awake, Jane," I said, and opened my eyes. Seated close by the child, facing us, looking steadily at me, was Etienne.

"We were admiring you, dear," said Janey. "Weren't we, Etienne?" He smiled kindly at the child. "You're beautiful with your eyes shut, Theo," she went on; "your lashes are so sweet against your cheek! She was looking down when you first saw her, wasn't she, Etienne?" He shook his head. "What was she doing then?"

"Her eyes were very wide open," said Etienne, an expression of such admiration in his that I felt my color rise, "and she was scolding very hard and stamping her foot."

"What?" cried Jane, sitting up in her surprise.

"Yes," said Etienne, with an amused smile, "but she wasn't scolding me, Jane. She wore," he went on, impressively, "a blue and white check frock, soaking wet; and her dark mane, as she shook it in her indignation, flung off a shower of drops. When she saw me, she ran away." He stopped speaking, and a look of sadness clouded his dark face.

"And then?" questioned little Jane, her eyes big with interest.

"Then?" echoed Etienne, absently.

"Yes," urged Janey, "what happened then?"

"Nothing much," he said, steadily, "only I discovered that I had fallen in love—that was all."

"The cat episode!" cried Jane, in wild excitement. "Did you help beat Herbert? When did you see her again? Why didn't you come and see her, like the others? Why did you wait so long, Etienne?" She sank down beside me again; then, turning an anxious little face, asked why my heart beat so. "It throbs, and throbs!" she said.

I colored hotly. Etienne's eyes flashed, as if in sudden excitement.

"Lay your cheek against it, Janey," he said, softly, "and you may, perhaps, learn its secrets."

The child obeyed, holding up a small finger to enjoin silence. "It repeats two names over and over, just two," she said, and laughed out in elfish fashion.

"What two, Jane?" questioned Etienne, a note of intense eagerness in his voice.

"If I tell you," said the child, "may I hear about all your sweethearts?"

"I never had but one," he said, gravely.

"No, no, Jane," I interposed. I was cut to the quick already by his nonsense about seeing me as a child. I felt I could not stand any more. "You mustn't tease Etienne."

"May I hear about that one?" Janey went on, paying no attention to my words.

"Yes—if Theo is willing, Jane."

"Her heart says," whispered the child, " 'Janey, Etienne—Etienne, Janey!' Our names—just ours."

Etienne bent forward, putting an arm across the hammock, and rested his hand on the strands close against my shoulder. He looked into my eyes until I was forced to glance away—daunted, frightened, by the glow in his.

"May I tell the child my love story, Theo?" he murmured.

I felt myself paling to the lips. "If you tell but the truth," I said, coldly.

"Isn't her neck lovely through this filmy stuff?" said Jane, dreamily; "see, I shall lay my head just here," patting me softly, "and listen to your story."

"Isn't this golden hair lovely, you mean," I said, drawing a long lock through my fingers. "But you're not a vain little pussy!"

"Vain!" exclaimed the child. "How can I be, when it's worn long to cover a hump?"

I glanced appealingly at Etienne. His answer

startled me, for, stooping, he kissed both golden tress and the fingers that held it. I drew my hand away.

"It is too soon for my love story, then?" he said, sadly. "Yet I have waited so long, Theo!"

"Go ahead," commanded small Jane, "we're both ready now. Why did you wait, that's the question? Of course you fell in love with my Theo the minute you saw her—they all do—but why didn't you contrive to see her again and say so?"

"I saw her every year," said Etienne, gravely, "but I took great care that she should not see me."

"Why?" demanded the child.

"I was only a Rappelle——"

"And you were afraid that father would make her marry you for your money," cried Jane, starting up again in her eagerness, "and he would. But—oh dear me!" she burst into a sudden storm of sobs, "she's done it, after all."

"No, Jane," I said, earnestly, clasping the poor little thing in my arms, and forgetting Etienne in my desire to soothe her, "no, no, no."

"For what then?" demanded Etienne, sternly. "Don't quiet the child with falsehoods."

"You shan't scold Theo," she wailed, "for she's 'most too good to live! Oh, dear, oh, dear, now I've gone and made myself think of that awful Portent again! I can't sleep for thinking about it. I'm too bad a child to want to go in the Death Coach, yet I'm the one who ought to, because of my crooked back—Lilian said so, and for once she's right."

I made no further effort to soothe her. I knew it would be best for her to speak her heart out.

"This morning I thought mean thoughts of people," she went on. "They all came to church for the first time, and I knew why! They hoped to flatter the Lord God into helping them get their jewels back—and I was glad He'd be angry with them for it, yes, I

was! Old gump Bandhar down on his marrow-bones, bawling out the responses as if he were good as good; and all the time with half his mind full of scarf-pins, and the other half full of hatred of Herbert."

"Why of Herbert?" asked Etienne, quickly.

"Oh, because Herbert's so fond of Theo—he's got a right to be, for he's our cousin—and Bandhar's as silly over her himself! No, not quite so silly, but almost."

"No wonder that my story fails to rouse interest, when you listen to so many every day," said Etienne, looking at me coldly.

Janey dried her eyes, forgetting herself in watching us.

"You tell such different tales," I said, suavely, "that I always find them interesting."

"Different, Theo? Pray explain."

"Before the child?" I asked.

"Yes."

"What about the charming girl, married to the man who fails to understand her?"

"Do I understand you, Theo?"

I was ashamed of the glow of happiness that suddenly warmed my heart.

"This is extremely interesting," said Janey, in an awed voice. "May I help? Etienne," very solemnly, "I think Theo likes you better than anybody in the world—after me. Now then, please kiss her betrothal ring, and say that the big ruby is a drop of your heart's blood."

Etienne said nothing, but he kissed both the ruby and my hand.

"There goes your heart again, Theo, thump, thump, thump!" said Jane. "Don't you feel well? Yes? Then why don't you tell poor Etienne how much you care for him now?"

"Say something nice to me, Theo, if you can," pleaded Etienne.

I smiled and blushed. How foolish they were—yet I found their nonsense sweet.

"You are both geese," I said. "But I prefer geese to swans—sometimes."

Etienne still held my hand in his, little Jane clasped them close in both of hers. "Do you like him next best to me, Theo? Answer."

"Yes, Jane," I whispered, meekly.

"Well now, Etienne, I hope you're satisfied!" said the child.

"No, not yet, little Jane," he said, quietly.

"Then you're a Greedy Peter," said Jane, severely, "for you can't come first. I'm first with Theo, always. Listen to the soft rustle, rustle, up above in the branches. The leaves are talking to the birds. Isn't it pleasant here under these great big trees? How quiet the river is; and such a queer gray! And the sky's beginning to match it—it looks unnatural, somehow! I hate unnatural things! I'm unnatural, Herbert's unnatural. I do believe a storm is coming!"

"In what way?" Etienne asked.

"In what way what?" demanded the child. "Oh, you mean about Herbert—gracious, here comes Hervey! Now what does he want? It's always the way! Just when we three are having a perfect time together, all soothed down, forgetting our worries, then along comes somebody to interrupt. What is it, Hervey, please?"

Etienne was frowning at his faithful servant, and I, too, felt annoyed. Jane's grumbling was echoed in our hearts. We were very comfortable—Hervey was not welcome. I was more than comfortable, I was ridiculously happy. Happy that the very thing had happened that I had so earnestly wished to prevent; Etienne loved me! To be sure, my happiness was a trifle marred by self-scorn; I had the grace to be ashamed of my unconquerable desire to please. My

conscience reproved me for the delight I felt in learning that I, and I alone, filled my husband's heart—that I had not, never had had, any rival.

"Mrs. Gill wishes to see Mrs. Rappelle," Hervey announced.

"Well," sighed Jane, "I mind her less than one of those tiresome strangers-within-our-gates. You will stay with me, won't you, Etienne?"

"Yes, Janey," he said, kindly, as he almost lifted me from my hammock. "Theo," he whispered, as he slowly released me, "did you mean what you said just now? Do I come—next to the child?"

"Yes, Etienne."

"My darling!" he murmured. I moved hurriedly away.

"Straws show which way the wind blows," said Hervey, as he followed me to the house, "and felts and velvets likewise, I imagine. Hers is on her right ear."

I knew that he alluded to Mrs. Gill's bonnet.

"I hope nothing has gone wrong at the farm, Hervey," I said.

"I fear something has, Mrs. Rappelle, since her mind to her a king-pin isn't," he answered, gravely. "She doesn't even smile as she would want to smile—she's talking, with an effort, to Mr. Praie."

Hervey was right; Mrs. Gill sat in her high buggy, her lilac-bestrewn bonnet on one side, making a very apparent effort to keep up a lively conversation with one of the detectives. She was evidently relieved to see me, and asked if I would drive a little way with her, as she wished to talk to me.

"We all come to Mrs. Rappelle now, same as we did when she was Miss Braithe," she explained, with an air of gracious condescension to Mr. Praie, who was helping me into the buggy. "She an' me often put our heads together over advising each other." And

with a smile that was intended to be arch, but was only ghastly, because of her liveliness being forced, we drove rapidly away. When we had passed between the Leopards, however, she drew the horse down to a walk.

"He may be smart as all possessed, Miss Theo, but he certainly doesn't look to be!" she said, alluding to the detective. "Whatever keeps 'em hangin' or here so long, I wonder? Them thieves must be miles away by now! But p'raps they enjoy our mountainous air." Then, dismissing the detectives from her thoughts, she turned an anxious face toward me. "I'm harried most to death about Jim," she said. "They say he's been hangin' 'round the brick-yards lately, and I seen him, only a half-hour back, slip along past the alders just above the brook, as I crossed the bridge on my way to church. I jest turned back an' come quick for you. I think by now he's at the edge of the meadows yonder, in the woods," pointing toward the river with her whip. "Most likely in the little path that runs top o' the bank. I do want my Jim to quit roamin' and come home!" she burst out, with sudden vehemence. "No," as I would have spoken, "of course I know he can't stay—though it's an extryordinary thing to me why him an' Mr. Gill can't agree! The green-eyed monster, I guess, Miss Theo," wagging her head with would-be playfulness. "But there, you can't mix oil an' water, and if Jim does take after me, his temper is most extryordinarily like Mr. Wylde's, who, when riled, was worse than a prickly catcus—but it's ill speakin' against the dead. Now Abel has the sweetest, flacidest disposition, but Jim was always a limb of Satan! If only Mr. Rappelle would get a chance for the poor boy out West; an' if you'll speak a word to him now—I dassen't myself, he bein' so mad!"

"I am very sorry to hear that you are still anxious

about him," I said, gravely. Then, remembering what Herbert had told me about giving Jim a chance to earn his living, I added, "I understood Mr. Fayne to say that Jim was doing well now."

Mrs. Gill shook her head. "'Tain't true," she said, sadly. "I guess Mr. Herbert's the same as ever; he always would say black was white to pleasure you. Oh, Miss Theo, if you only would try what you can do! Jim sets such store by you." I got out of the buggy. "But you ain't got any parasol! Nor a hat! Oh, Miss Theo!"

I assured her that I needed no protection from the sun since the sky was, as little Jane had pointed out, already overcast.

"An' you've got a fan, too," said Mrs. Gill. "My, but that snake looks extryordinarily reel! I can most see it wriggle." I took it from my belt that she might examine it more closely. She passed her finger over the silver lilies embossed upon the outside sticks.

"Ain't they heavy!" she exclaimed, in admiration, "yet they appear to be as light as light, jest floatin'. I won't wait, if you don't mind, Miss Theo; 'twouldn't do for him to see me here."

She drove away while I, replacing the fan at my side, and catching up my pretty trailing skirts lest unseen briers should rend them, walked swiftly across the meadow toward the point indicated. The woods grew thick upon the steep bank above the river, and the underbrush was dense and difficult to push aside. As I picked my way carefully through the thicket, thinking every moment to come upon the little foot-path, I stopped now and again to listen, hoping to hear Jim's firm footfall, or the crackling of twigs, to tell me of his neighborhood. But I heard nothing, save the ordinary woodland sounds. Presently I found the path—a mere track worn by the workmen—and stood uncertain which way to go. I decided to turn

to the right, but after skirting the bank, in the direction of the entrance gate, for some distance, I felt sure that I might better have gone the other way, and have followed the path eastward, toward the chapel. This I did with no better success. Jim was nowhere to be seen.

Despairing of finding him, I returned to the place where I had at first come out from the thicket, thinking that if he were still in the wood he must pass by me to return to the high-road. Here, beneath a tall walnut tree, I seated myself to wait, with what patience I might, for one who in all probability would not come. My thoughts were such pleasant company, however, that some time passed before I realized that I had been waiting long; and then it was an odd rustling in the underbrush that recalled my mission to my wandering mind. Ashamed of my selfishness, I listened intently. Was it Jim? A long moment passed; then a brown rabbit hopped briskly into the path, and, seeing me, came to an abrupt standstill. The little creature was so much frightened that its tiny heart throbbed, and I held myself as motionless as the tree-trunk against which I leaned, hoping to quiet its terrors. I succeeded in convincing it that I was harmless, for after a few moments it hopped away and disappeared.

Tired of sitting still, I began to walk up and down the narrow track, quite without hope of seeing Jim, yet unwilling to return to the house until I had waited as long as possible. I felt I must give him every chance. Because of the dull heavens, it was already darker than it should have been at that time of the afternoon. I fancied that it must be long past six o'clock. Under the heavy trees, shut in so closely by the thicket of underbrush, a gloomy twilight reigned. The dampness from the recent showers brought out all the sweet scents of the woods, and had it not been

for the knowledge that Etienne might disapprove of my loitering, unaccompanied, so far from home, I would have enjoyed the repose of the hour.

Below the rugged slope the river seemed to be saying "Hu-s-h, hu-s-h!" to the shore. I stopped to listen. As I did so a hand was laid lightly upon my arm. Terrified, I turned quickly, crying, "Jim?"

It was Herbert Fayne.

XXV

I had not been alone with Herbert since the night of the accident, but his look of displeased surprise quickly dispelled my alarm. For if I frowned at him, he certainly did not smile at me; but, his fingers tightening upon my arm, eyed me with suspicion.

"What are you doing here, Dora?" he demanded.

"I am looking for Jim Wylde, Herbert," I said, coldly. "Have you seen him?"

"And what do you want of Jim?" he asked.

"I wish to speak to him, Herbert—please let go of my arm—I want him to be reconciled with his people, to turn over a new leaf, and to go home."

"You want to spoil him with some philanthropic nonsense, I suppose. Is that it?" he said, sneeringly. "You want Rappelle to provide for him?"

I did not answer.

"You mustn't pauperize poor old Jim, Dolly," he continued, slipping his fingers down my arm until he could clasp my hand, "that will never do!"

"Have you been talking to him yourself?" I asked. "Have you really given him work, and renewed your old intimacy?"

"There never was, never could be, any intimacy between Jim Wylde and me," was the careless answer. "Class distinctions forbid."

"Class distinctions!" I exclaimed, scornfully. "What nonsense you talk! You are both Americans, your grandfathers were Americans, so you stand as equals in the race."

"What race, dear?" he asked, idly.

"The race for success," I said. "You look as though dressed for some race now."

He wore a blue shirt of light-weight flannel, knickerbockers, golf stockings, and tennis shoes. These last had enabled him to approach me noiselessly, their rubber soles making no sound. He wore no hat, and the damp atmosphere made his closely cropped hair curl in soft rings about his forehead. This careless dress showed his beautiful figure to the utmost advantage. His necktie was almost unfastened, allowing the flannel collar to fall away from his pillar-like throat; his sleeves were rolled up above the elbow, disclosing magnificently shaped arms. I thought I had never seen anyone to compare with him—but I tried to draw away my hand.

"I make all the others sing small, Dolly?" he asked, smiling, the suspicious expression dying from his eyes, and the one I feared succeeding it. "Is that what you're thinking, dear?"

"Let me go, Herbert," I commanded. "It is time I was at home."

He did not answer, but looked down at me in a way that made me wish that the black silk lining of my thin summer gown were cut high. In a passion of indignation I strove to wrench my hand away. I stamped my foot.

"Herbert," I cried, "you are detestable! Let me go, at once."

"Dear, dear, what a little termagant!" he said, smiling, and released my hand only to catch me lightly, but firmly, about the waist with both arms. I placed my hands upon his breast, pushing him from me. This he allowed, as far as the length of his arms would permit. "No horses for me to manage here," he went on, "I can devote myself entirely to my sweet little cousin!"

His eyes shone, but he had paled in his excitement

—he looked a reckless dare-devil. So must Apollo have looked, I thought, when he pursued poor Daphne; and a great disgust filled my heart.

"Herbert," I said, gravely, trying to conceal both this feeling and my fear, "because you are my cousin I have given you, as such, many rights——"

"I want a husband's—or a lover's, Dolly," he broke in, quickly, "a cousin's rights be hanged!"

This insult stung me to fury and, scarce knowing what I did, I lifted my fan and struck him sharply across the face. Because of the silver lotus-flowers, the blow was a heavy one; but, disregarding it, he only laughed gayly, as if in delight at my prowess, and, crushing me to him, cried:

"You know the saying, Dolly—a kiss for a blow! Now, take what you have earned."

Covering my face with both hands, I strove, desperately, to save myself from the stain of his lips, although heart-sick from the consciousness that this effort must prove vain. Then I heard singing close at hand—and knew that I was free. Someone was approaching, along the road from the direction of the chapel.

"'Her brow is like the snaw-drift,
Her throat is like the swan;
Her face it is the fairest——"

sang a pleasant tenor voice. Herbert released me quickly, moving aside; and, as I strove to regain my composure, Mr. Praie, the detective, appeared before us.

"I'm after you, Mr. Fayne," he said, taking off his hat in acknowledgment of my presence.

"What?" exclaimed Herbert, sharply, stepping back a pace, and eying the man oddly.

"Can't do without you, sir," was the smiling answer, "for you're a host in yourself!"

Herbert, looking relieved, said, with his customary

air of good-nature, that he was quite at Mr. Praie's disposal.

As I tried to recover some ease of manner, realizing keenly all the time the impossibility of hiding my distress, I could not but agree with Mrs. Gill in her opinion, that the detective was stupid. For he stood staring at us with an air of benevolent density, apparently unconscious of my embarrassment, and not seeming to see the mark of my fan across Herbert's cheek. But, even while I wondered, he commented upon this.

"I guess you've been scrambling up the bank through the brambles," he said, comfortably, "they've slapped your face badly."

"Yes," said Herbert, coloring faintly, "you're right, as always, Praie. It would take a clever chap to fool you!"

Again I wondered at the detective's obtuseness—but was it real or only assumed? Herbert had made no effort to hide the sneer in his voice, yet the man chuckled, as if pleased by his flattery. Mr. Praie was fat and sandy. He looked as if he might readily detect a mistake in some favorite dish, but not a flaw in the heart of a fellow-creature.

"I guess you've been playing tennis," he now said, with an air of conceit that I might, under other circumstances, have found amusing.

"Right again," said Herbert, laughing; and his laugh was insolent.

"Want to know how I knew?" demanded the detective.

"Yes," sneered Herbert.

"Tennis shoes," said Mr. Praie, pointing at Herbert's feet with a fat forefinger.

"Praie, you're an out-and-out marvel!" exclaimed Herbert. "Those thieves haven't the ghost of a chance, have they, Dolly?" And he smiled at me as fondly as though we had been alone.

I became suddenly afraid that Mr. Praie might leave us; while the fear that he might not seemed to enter Herbert's head at the same moment, for he said, hastily, "I must take my cousin home before I can be of any use to you, Praie. I don't like to have her go alone—so many toughs about, you know. You wait here, and I'll be back in a jiffy."

"Toughs? Yes, you may bet your life!" was the cheerful answer. "I stumble upon 'em by the dozen—in my profession."

I looked at the man appealingly—could I make him desire to return with me? He must.

"Mr. Praie will come, too," I said, smiling at him. "He doesn't want to be caught in the storm that is coming. Do you, Mr. Praie?"

"A storm is coming sure enough, Mrs. Rappelle, but not this afternoon, I guess," was the placid answer. "Nothing, that is, but a preliminary caper, so to speak," he added, jestingly.

"No, no, Dolly," Herbert interfered; "Praie will wait here for me. This is a grand place to discuss secrets in."

"Grand," assented Praie, absently; "did I feel a drop?" He held up a fat hand. "And you without an umbrella or cloak, Mrs. Rappelle! Guess you'd better hurry along."

"Please come, too!" I said. I looked at him piteously, and, unconsciously, held out my hand. I had made up my mind not to go without him.

Herbert stepped quickly forward and took my outstretched hand in his. "Come, Dolly!" he said, attempting to draw me on. "I'll be back directly, Praie."

I tried to pull my hand away; but Herbert, perhaps counting too much upon the detective's lack of insight, released it only to throw an arm around me, and urged me along the path.

"Isn't she an obstinate little cousin?" he said, in would-be playful tones. "Come on, child! Praie's got sense enough to know that two's company."

"And three's a crowd. And four," said the detective reflectively, "is a gang! A gang of ruffians, I guess."

I felt that the moment had come when I must speak out, and tell at least a part of the truth. I decided to say that Herbert was teasing me, and that I did not wish to be alone with him. But to say this lightly—as I knew it must be said—required such an effort, and my nerves were already so unstrung, that as I began to speak my eyes filled with tears.

"Mr. Praie—" I faltered, looking into his fat face, imploringly, "Mr. Praie——"

"Bless me!" he interrupted, apparently not noticing that I was speaking, "I'd forgotten all about it, and it's just the thing. That queer party gave it to me, and I popped it in here. Want to see a handy pocket, Mrs. Rappelle?" and he held open his coat.

As Mr. Praie evidently expected my undivided attention, Herbert was obliged to let me go. Grateful for the opportunity to escape him, if only for a moment, I admired the large pocket let into the lining of the detective's coat, enthusiastically.

"See what's in it!" continued Mr. Praie, in a tone as though speaking to a child. "And you shall have it, too, for he told me to give it to the lady it would become the most. Ah! there's another drop of rain. I guess I'd better hurry and cover you up."

So saying he drew from the big pocket a flat parcel, wrapped in the same odd paper as that upon which the palmist had written his verse, and, opening it, disclosed what appeared to be but a square of very heavy embroidery. Silver lotus-flowers and their leaves, so massed together that the material upon which they were worked was invisible. The square, when un-

folded, proved to be but one end of a very broad and long scarf, of diaphanous gray silk; and this Mr. Praie proceeded to twist deftly about my shoulders. Astonished, I stood quite still, while with puckered brows and mouth pursed up, he arranged the voluminous scarf to his liking. When he had finished, the broad embroidered ends completely covered the thinner part; spreading over my shoulders on either side, like a cloak. These ends were impenetrable, because of the silver lilies and their leaves.

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Praie, "they've got to be fastened at your throat, front and back. There's more to come, see!"

He took from the same pocket a small flat box of sandal-wood, and opened it. Within were two little coiled snakes of silver, with tiny moonstone eyes.

"Brooches," said the detective, complacently. "Cute, ain't they? Something like that wriggler your fan is swung on. Guess that palmist feller buys 'em by the gross!" He laughed, and, taking out the little pins, fastened my oddly contrived cape securely. "Whole business smells of sandal-wood, don't it? Hope you don't object to the scent, Mrs. Rappelle? No? That's good. I don't like it myself. Now I guess, if you're ready, we'll make tracks for home. It doesn't pour, so to speak, but it's beginning to come down quite lively!" And keeping up his commonplace rattle he started me on my journey.

His lack of comprehension—or his pretence of it—served me well; for he utterly failed to understand Herbert's efforts to leave him in the woods, and, when that proved impossible, to induce him to give up his place close behind me. Beside me neither could walk, since the path was only wide enough for one. Hints, innuendoes, and, at last, outspoken remonstrances, were alike vain. At my heels Mr. Praie kept until we emerged from the thicket, and entered

the open path leading from the chapel to the house, when he appropriated the place at my side, leaving Herbert to follow—and to fume.

By the time we reached home the rain was falling fast, and from the distance came the dull rumble of thunder.

"It won't last long," said Mr. Praie, cheerfully; "we're only getting the edges of the shower. See, Mrs. Rappelle, the sun is trying to struggle out and drive it away from you, and Braithe Manor!"

Over the hills to the west there was a slight rift in the clouds; but even as I looked it closed, and the feeble ray of sunshine was gone.

"Never mind," said my kind companion, "the clouds have got a silver lining anyhow!"

"Like your famous pocket," I said, smiling. "And if you will wait until I can take out the brooches, you shall have its lining back again."

"Let me unfasten them, Dolly!" cried Herbert, springing forward, and nearly knocking Mr. Praie down. I was surprised at the dexterity the little man showed in avoiding him, yet, somehow, managing to remain just where he had been when Herbert advanced.

"Mrs. Rappelle's maid will do it best," he said, good-humoredly, while he caught Herbert's arm and punched him playfully in the ribs. "You and I are butter-fingered fellers, Mr. Fayne! Say, will you give me just three words apart, now? No, Mrs. Rappelle," shaking his head at me, "I won't take the scarf back. I don't gives presents with a string tied to 'em. Honestly now, I'll feel hurt if you won't accept it."

"And the palmist?" I asked. "Surely he will feel hurt if you——"

"Not a bit of it," he interrupted, earnestly. "But if you'd rather not have it for keeps, perhaps you'll

take care of it for me for just a few days. I'd really be obliged."

To this I willingly consented. "Here's Mr. Rappelle," he continued, as Etienne came into the hall from the library. "Will you look at Mrs. Rappelle's mackintosh, sir? It's a mighty curious one, but it's kept her shoulders dry. Now, then, Mr. Fayne, shall we step into your sanctum sanctorum?" And he drew Herbert into the latter's room, leaving Etienne and me alone.

"Silver wings—folded forward!" said Etienne, smiling. "An odd rain-cloak, indeed, Theo. You went away with Mrs. Gill, Merle said. Won't you spare time to tell me her errand?"

I followed him into the library with lagging steps; I had no wish to relate my experiences of the afternoon.

"See what quaint little brooches, Etienne!" I said, as he closed both doors behind us. "Will you unpin the one in the back for me, please, so that I may show you the scarf?" He did as I requested, and I unwound it and held it up for him to admire. "It is such a filmy thing, Etienne, it looks as though woven of mist!" and I tossed it lightly over my head. It fell far below my shoulders.

"A star in a cloud," he said, gently, "or the Lady Moon herself!"

I smiled, and swept a courtesy—if only I might escape making a full confession!

"I want you to do something for me, Etienne," I said, coaxingly. "I want you to find employment for poor James Wylde, far, far out West—if his mother and I can persuade him to accept it!"

He took my hand and raised it to his lips. "I am in a mood for granting favors, Theo," he said.

"What has happened to put you in so kindly a humor?" I asked, blushing under his admiring gaze.

"I am happy because of your gift, Theo."

"My gift?" I was indeed puzzled. "Do you mean this scarf? It is not mine, but Mr. Praie's." And I hastened to tell him everything that had occurred, omitting, of course, Herbert's ill-behavior.

"So Praie brought you this?" Etienne asked, looking keenly at me and touching the scarf.

"No," I said, "he did not bring it for me; he only happened to have it in his pocket when he happened along."

"A great many happens," said Etienne, slowly. "And I happen, I suppose, to be happy, Theo. Perhaps I have no right to be, perhaps you did not intend to give me what I prize so highly."

"May I know what this great gift is, Etienne?" I asked, gently.

"It is Hope," he said.

I stood silent—for I did not know what to say. My heart began to beat in its new foolish fashion, my color came and went, I dared not raise my eyes. He came close to me, and, putting his arm around me, drew me to him.

"Theo," he whispered, softly, "Theo, my darling, did you mean what you said in the rose-garden? You have begun to like me a little? I come next to Jane in your heart?"

"Yes—Etienne," I faltered. And I felt his lips upon my cheek.

"May I come in?" clamored Jane at the door. "Herbert says Theo is in here, dressed up in the scarf of a fairy!"

"Oh, yes," sighed Etienne, resignedly. "Come in if you like, little Jane!"

XXVI

I thought long of Herbert that night—and the more I thought, the more anxious I became. There had been much notice taken of the welt across his face, and great curiosity shown as to how he had come by it. He had borne all the raillery and cross-questioning with the utmost good-humor, not even wincing when a chance shot went home, as when Freddy Love insisted that the mark was the result of an effort to pick forbidden fruit.

"Even when grapes hang far above my head," Herbert had rejoined, with his sunny smile, "I'm not a fox, to call them sour!"

"Meaning that you will go on scrambling for them, Mr. Fayne?" Mrs. Allenby asked, with a swift glance at me.

"Yes," was the laconic answer, "I shall."

This, being taken as a joke, raised a laugh, but my heart sank within me. What could I do, I asked myself, if Herbert persisted in his folly. The answer from my conscience came quickly, "Tell Etienne." Etienne, who had but just spoken of his love for me! I had thought before that it would be easy to speak to him of Herbert, did he care for me; and now, had I felt that his love was founded upon esteem, I would not have hesitated. But I suspected that his fancy had been taken, when I was in my early teens, only because of my name. As a Braithe I possessed a fascination for a Rappelle; my background of tradition threw a glamour around me. But the name, while it gave me charm in his eyes, also did me a

wrong; for he knew of the evil in the Braithe blood and might be pardoned for suspecting, did I tell of Herbert's strange infatuation, that I had done much to increase and nothing to prevent it.

My growing affection for my husband was founded upon a rock; it must endure. But his love for me—would it bear so sharp a test? I thought not, and I hesitated before the misery of seeing it die. I would put off the evil day. Herbert's wicked thoughts would wander from me were I careful to avoid him. Even as I decided upon this course I knew it to be wrong; but my besetting sin, my Braithe sin, the desire to please, held me to it.

Monday was as depressing, as hot and muggy, as had been the two preceding days; and I thought that all the members of our house-party, save Mr. Carrington, were glad to leave Braithe Manor. There was something a trifle odd in their manner when bidding us good-by; a something that told me that the curious superstition of the Portent had taken a strong hold upon their imaginations. In the eyes of all there lurked an expression of uneasy dread, as they went through with the customary civilities of farewell. It was as though each secretly wondered for which one of our little family group Death had driven the Phantom Coach—and those galloping horses—to the door of Braithe House. They all said good-by so very gently to my little Jane.

Mrs. Ainslie had invited Lilian to spend two weeks at Newport with her, in August. But even with this visit in prospect, Lilian was in very low spirits; her cheeks were pale, the corners of her mouth drooped, and her pretty forehead was marred by a disfiguring frown.

Mr. Praie had given our guests a stirrup-cup, in the shape of cheerful news about the missing jewels. He had assured them that at last a clue had been found,

and that the lost trinkets would soon be restored. He stood, with Lilian, Janey, Herbert and me, at the top of the steps, seeing the party off. Etienne went with them to town, for the day.

"Have you a clue?" Herbert asked, as the carriages disappeared down the avenue.

"No," said Mr. Praie, composedly. "Thought I'd give 'em a good send off, that's all."

"To speed the departing pests!" said Hervey, who was standing just behind me.

"The good riddance of anything bad—rubbishy people, or any trash—is comforting," added Janey.

I felt that we were rude. "Hush, Jane," I said, gently. "You are very fond of Mrs. Love and Mr. Carrington. And they are all pleasant people."

"Why did they all go at once, I wonder," said Herbert, while I felt Janey's kiss of repentance upon my hand.

"Rats leaving a sinking ship," said Lilian, morosely, then cried out in terror, as a large black spider suddenly appeared crawling upon her shoulder. "Kill it, kill it!" she shrieked, as, quicker than the others, I knocked it off with my fan. Shuddering—for I dislike killing anything—I complied. "A death's-head spider!" moaned Lilian (it had had the odd markings of skull and cross bones upon its bloated back), "and you were fool enough to kill it, Theo Braithe. It's not nine yet, hours from noon.

'Araignée au matin, chagrin!'

You'll have bad luck all day long."

"Why, you told her to kill it—" Janey began, when Mr. Praie interrupted her:

"Pardon me," he said, "but I don't understand that lingo. Will someone kindly explain?"

Herbert answered him. "This is a French super-

stition," he said, with a contemptuous glance toward Lilian. "Kill a spider in the morning, vexation; at noon, pleasure; in the evening, hope. I mean to smash mine at night every time, for I'm in need of hope, badly," and he looked at me.

I avoided him all that day, and, thanks to Mr. Praie, who seemed unable to get along without him, I managed to do so easily. I wondered that the detectives remained at Braithe (the policeman from Hilltown had gone home), but they hung about the house, as idle a pair of men as one might see. Mr. Praie spent most of his time burning incense under Herbert's handsome nose. And, although Herbert showed openly that he found the little man in the way, I could see that the detective's flattery pleased him.

I was in my oratory that afternoon when there came a peremptory tap on the panel, and, sliding it aside before I could rise from my knees, Lilian entered. I stared at her in surprise, for she was already dressed for dinner, and in a wonderful toilet, considering that, save for Herbert and the two detectives, we were quite alone. She wore a gown of exquisite white lace, over pale lilac. Around her slender waist a belt of shimmering lilac satin ribbon, with long streamers. In one hand she carried three red roses; in the other her fetich, the little New Testament bound in red morocco.

In spite of her becoming frock, she did not look so pretty as usual. Her cheeks were very pale, and her eyelids red and swollen. Because of this, and of her having entered my sanctum uninvited, the sight of the fetich alarmed me. I had not been sworn to secrecy in several weeks, and I wondered what trouble was a-foot.

"Come out of this dismal hole, Theo," she said, imperiously. "But no, stay where you are, on your knees before the cross, and swear that you'll never breathe to a soul what I'm going to tell you."

As she spoke her eyes filled with tears, and, although I knew these to be but tears of self pity—Lilian wept over her own sorrows only—I remained kneeling upon my *prie-dieu* as she desired. Her trouble was real enough to her.

"You needn't be afraid," she went on, "for the grocer and the brat aren't in it. Now then swear."

I took my oath.

"I don't believe you care for me one bit," she whimpered, as we entered my dressing-room. "I don't believe you'd even dress for dinner to please me; or have that beast of a dog stay with Jane to-night, so that I can talk things over with you in peace without his racketing about!"

In order to quiet her nerves, I let her choose my gown, and promised that Charles Stuart should be absent for the night. I was surprised when, after tossing over all my frocks, she selected one of black satin that she had always disliked. It was very simply made, the only trimming being a fall of rich black lace around the low corsage.

"I thought you—" I began, but she interrupted me hastily.

"Yes, I know, but Etienne hates to see you in black, and I want a real proof of your affection. Besides, this shining stuff is becoming, and black throws up the whiteness of your shoulders. The long train suits you, too. Tell Josette to dress your hair low, and to stick one of these roses in it; wear the others high up on your corsage, so that they rest against your velvety skin——"

"O Lilian!" I remonstrated.

"They make it look like snow—I heard someone say so," she said, looking at me oddly. "And be sure that you tie a narrow band of black velvet around your throat—to increase the snow effect."

I frowned, indignant; but before I could speak, she flung her arms about me, and kissed my cheek.

"I'm in such trouble," she whispered, "such awful trouble, Theo!—but you'll pull me through."

"If I can," I said, gently, although no longer anticipating anything serious, since she could spare so much thought on a trifle like dress. "Is it about Mr. Carrington?" I hazarded.

"Yes," she sobbed, "and unless you—or the Death Coach—help me out, I might better not have been born."

"The Death Coach?" I repeated. "I wish you'd forget that nonsense, Lilian."

She drew back, staring at me strangely.

"Before the clock strikes twelve to-night," she said, in an awed whisper, "a Braithe will die." She stepped forward, and grasping my arm, drew me into the little cell we had just left; then, pointing to the ivory cross, she continued, solemnly, "If, by midnight, a new devil has been added to the legions in hell, I will believe in that emblem and all that it stands for." And before I could speak, could say a word in remonstrance, she ran lightly away.

Her allusion to the Phantom Coach told me that Herbert was at the bottom of her trouble, and I feared that he must have managed to interfere seriously between her and Mr. Carrington. How he had contrived to bring her into such a state of subjection I could not imagine, rack my brains as I might; but I felt very much ashamed of my own cowardice in not having told Etienne of his mischief-making qualities. I tried to make up my mind to tell just what I had but a few hours before decided to keep to myself; but, as I was putting the roses Lilian had given me into water, she hastily re-entered the room and unconsciously vetoed my good intentions. She still had the Testament in her hand, and held it out toward me as she said:

"Swear that you won't tell Etienne anything—not even about wearing that gown to please me."

I refused to take my oath again, but consented to keeping even that trifle a secret.

"I want you to meet me here at ten sharp, Theo."

"Very well, Lilian," I said, resignedly.

"You won't let Rappelle keep you late in the library? Don't tell him I want you. Swear you won't, Theo!"

Her lips had grown suddenly ashen; she looked ill. I hastened to give my promise to do all I could for her, and her pretty color swept back; she even smiled as she left the room.

"One in the eye for the grocer this time!" she called back, softly, over her shoulder, and again I felt that I had been unnecessarily alarmed.

Herbert was standing at the foot of the staircase when I went down to dinner. I paused, looking doubtfully at him, when I reached the lowest step, my hand upon the head of the Leopard that, erect upon its haunches, the family shield clasped close to its breast, served as newel post. He surveyed me as closely, and smiled sadly, as if what he saw pleased, yet hurt him.

"Theo," he said, gravely, "I've been hoping for a word with you all day, but you have—I fear purposely—avoided me. I want to ask your forgiveness. I have behaved shamefully. I beg your pardon."

He spoke with great earnestness; his voice, his attitude, expressed deep contrition. I was almost convinced that he meant what he said.

"You don't believe me, I see," he continued, coming close to the mahogany Leopard, and dropping his voice to a mere whisper, "but you may. I am going away from here very soon, only I beg that you will not tell anyone; Praie insists upon my seeing this affair out—you understand?"

I nodded. I thought I did.

"I won't pretend I don't care for you," he went on, "for I do, but I've made up my mind to do the only thing that's left for me—I'll leave Braithe."

I remained silent, not knowing what to say.

"I shall never forget you as you look now, standing on the dear old staircase, in your trailing satin, with those red roses on your breast—" He broke off as though something choked him, and, in spite of myself, I began to make allowances.

I thought of his untrained boyhood, the lack of good counsel, and of his Braithe blood urging him toward evil. I remembered how hard it must have been for him to return to the old home he so loved, and see it in the possession of a stranger—and that stranger the descendant of a former servant of the House. Then I suddenly realized how little I had done to make things easier for him, too much absorbed in my own affairs to trouble myself about my cousin's. I ought to have interested myself in his life—how shamefully ignorant of his past I was—to have given him the help that women owe to their near kinsmen; but I had thought only of myself—and of Etienne.

In short, I became so busy upbraiding myself, that I began to think that I was the most in fault. "I am so sorry, Bertie," I faltered, the old nickname slipping unconsciously from my lips. "I'm afraid that I've not made your visit what it should have been. I've been thoughtless, selfish——"

"Hush, Theo," he said, softly; "I can't let you talk such nonsense as that! If you'll just say you forgive me——"

"I do," I cried, hastily; "I forgive you with all my heart."

He bent his head and kissed the hand on the Leopard.

"I've even been unjust to Rappelle," he said, his

eyes upon the ruby that glowed upon my finger, "pretending to myself that he treated you meanly, when that ring alone would prove me in the wrong."

I thought that he had chosen a poor place as confessional, at the foot of the staircase in the central hall, and so went on to the drawing-room, which I knew must be empty.

"It is a beautiful ruby," I said, pausing in front of the fireplace over which hung my portrait, with the miniature of the Scotch countess, as pendant, "as handsome of its kind as the Gypsy's Opal," and I sighed.

"A pigeon-blood ruby, a remarkably fine one," Herbert continued, meditatively. "It must have cost a small fortune. Do you miss your opal, Theo?"

"Yes," I said, shortly. I did not care to talk about its loss.

"I've made poor Lilian's life a burden over it," he went on, "and I'm sorry. Indeed, I've worried her too much lately, but I'll make it up to her—if you'll help me, Theo?"

"Help you, Herbert?" I said, surprised. "I don't see how I can help you with Lilian, but in any other way, should you need help, I will give it gladly."

"Thank you, Theodora—Gift of God!" he said, gently. "I believe there's no mean Braithe blood in you. Lydia used to say that you were the reincarnation of your double there," he pointed at the minature, "and I half believe she was right. When you struck me with your fan yesterday——"

"O Herbert!" I cried, in remonstrance.

"I thought of Lydia," he went on, not heeding my effort to stop him, "thought of her so suddenly, and intensely, it almost seemed as though she looked at me over your shoulder." He laughed oddly. "I felt uncanny for a minute," he said, "as if you and

the countess were one—and that Lydia had come to tell me so!"

"Listen!" I cried, interrupting him. "Do I hear wheels? It must be Etienne," and I moved toward the door.

"One moment, Theo," said Herbert, hastily. "Don't speak of my going, even to Rappelle, please."

I nodded, to show that I understood, and running into the hall, greeted Etienne as he entered. His stern face grew bright with pleasure at sight of me.

"You look like a gay Spanish girl, with that red rose in your dark hair," he said, smiling. "Come into the library and see what I've brought you from town."

He put a jewel box in my hands when the doors were closed behind us, and watched me, as one watches a child receiving a new toy, while I opened it and cried out in delight over what I found there.

"How lovely!" I exclaimed, taking out a sparkling diamond heart and looking at it admiringly. "How kind of you to get it for me—but how extravagant!"

"Nonsense!" he said, gayly. "If I may not buy my wife baubles, I shall think myself hardly used. May I clasp it around your throat?" He took the slender chain, adjusted and fastened it—then I felt his lips upon my shoulder. I turned quickly, paling, my heart beating wildly. "I beg your pardon," he said, slowly. "I thought I had more self-control."

He looked at me steadily, but his face was as colorless as my own; and I saw that he was greatly moved. I held out both hands to him, laughing a little.

"O Etienne, Etienne!" I said, "I am not angry. What a foolish man you are!"

He drew me to him, looking earnestly into my eyes, as if he would read my inmost thoughts; but he did not speak.

"I am so pleased with my new trinket," I said, quickly. "You are too good to me, Etienne!"

"Tell me why it pleases you better than anything I have ever given you before?" he asked. "I can see that it does."

I was very much embarrassed—my heart was so tiresome in its persistent, unaccountable throbbing—and I felt strangely shy—a new sensation for me.

"Well, you know," I faltered, "we have grown such great friends now, you and I."

He put his arm around me, and, placing a hand under my chin, gently tilted my face upward, the better to look into my eyes. But I let my eyelids fall.

"And before, I was a stranger, Theo?"

"Yes," I murmured.

"And, as such, my gifts annoyed you?"

"Yes, Etienne."

"You felt degraded when you wore them?" he demanded.

"O Etienne, please——"

"Answer, Theo."

"Yes," I whispered, flushing and paling by turns under this strange inquisition, and unable to find any graceful words in which to clothe the unpleasant truth.

"You are glad that your jewels were stolen, child?"

"No, no," I said, hastily; "I miss them dreadfully, Etienne."

His arm tightened around me—I feared he might feel the beating of my heart. "I am not your friend, but your lover," he whispered. "Will you wear the diamond heart?"

"Yes—Etienne."

"Willingly, Theo?"

The power of speech left me. I glanced up at him for one fleeting instant.

"I love you," he cried, with sudden passion. "I love you with all my heart and soul!" And he kissed me on the lips.

The door was gently opened on the merest crack, and

Hervey's voice, in melancholy cadences, floated through it announcing dinner.

"Go dress for dinner, Etienne," I said, nervously. "You will be very late."

Unwillingly, he released me. "Merle will soon become my *bête noir!*" he said, with a humorous smile. "I shan't see you again this evening, Theo, for those men will want to talk to me after dinner."

"They have no fresh clue," I said, moving toward the door. "Mr. Praie told Herbert so this morning. I have asked them to dine with us, now our guests have gone."

"Quite right, Theo," he said, approvingly; but I knew that at that moment he would have approved as heartily had I done the opposite. And I was happy because of this.

Lilian's behavior at dinner increased my serenity of mind, for she seemed to be on excellent terms with Herbert; and I fancied that while I had been in the library with Etienne he had made his peace with her. She laid herself out to be agreeable to everyone; admiring my diamond heart, and paying such flattering attention to Mr. Praie and his colleague that their heads appeared to be quite turned.

Etienne smiled at me from his place opposite; Herbert treated me with the respectful consideration of an affectionate cousin; Lilian's difficulties were, apparently, at an end. I was so happy, so very, very happy, that I felt a trifle awed. From childhood I had been unaccustomed to such a feeling. The ease of heart that comes from a peaceful home environment had never been mine. As I sat silent, too happy for speech, Mr. Praie suddenly addressed me.

"I got a line from that palmist feller to-day, Mrs. Rappelle, saying he hopes the scarf has pleased the person for whom it was intended." I looked at the little man inquiringly. "He meant it for you," Mr.

Praie continued, nodding his head at me; "said so in his letter. I'm glad to be rid of it; too strong of sandal-wood for me! Your wife must keep it now," he turned to Etienne, "mustn't she, sir?"

"I think she will be glad to," was the smiling answer.

I was pleased, but I wondered a little over the palmist's strange ways. He must have left Braithe that same evening, Saturday evening, I thought. I asked Etienne if this were so. He looked at me oddly for an instant, but Mr. Praie replied before he had time to answer.

"Off at once—after the seeance," he said, cheerfully, "but where he is now, Lord knows! No date to his letter, and postmark too blurred to read. He's a queer lot, that feller; but mighty sharp, I can tell you!"

"Not a patch on you, Praie!" said Herbert, all irony carefully kept from his voice, his eyes cast down.

"By the side of that palmist feller," said Mr. Praie, with sudden gravity, "I'm the veriest fool alive."

As I rose to leave the room it was the little detective who got first to the door, and bowed me out as though I had been a queen. I smiled at him kindly; I liked him very much, because of his good heart. When the men came into the drawing-room later, he chose to sit near me.

"The moon has left us," I said, lightly, "and to-night even the stars have disappeared, so drinking our coffee on the portico is not to be thought of—yet it is far pleasanter out there." I rose and stepped through the long window nearest me as I spoke.

It was as I had said; the stars were blotted out by heavy vapor, while across the river occasional flashes of heat-lightning against the horizon line made the gloom that followed but the deeper. The night, like the day, was hot and muggy. I was glad of my low-

cut bodice, and wished that Lilian had chosen a thinner evening gown for me. I sank into a low chair near the edge of the portico, and began to fan myself slowly. Then, as the scent of sandal-wood floated from the palmist's gift, I remembered Mr. Praie's dislike of the odor, and furled it gently.

"You never forget other people's tastes—or feelings, Mrs. Rappelle," he said, soberly. "And you may bet your life that some of us will take care that yours are remembered! There's going to be a big storm before the night is over—see that lightning yonder?—and may I be awake to see!"

XXVII

I would gladly have lingered late on the portico, as Braithe House promised to be too hot for comfort that night, notwithstanding the thickness of its old stone walls, the height of its ceilings, and the size of its rooms. But, remembering my promise to Lilian, I said good-night when the clock struck ten, and went upstairs. Although convinced that her trouble was at an end, since she and Herbert seemed to be on friendly terms at last, I hoped that she might still have something to confide. I wanted to hear of the happy ending of her love story—to learn that she was about to become engaged to my favorite, Mr. Carrington.

She left the drawing-room with me and followed me, in silence, up the staircase to my dressing-room door.

"Send Josette away," she whispered, pausing at the threshold. "Tell her you won't want her to-night —that's she not to hang around. Make her understand this, Theo."

I looked at her in pained surprise, for her face was drawn and haggard. Her pretty smiles, and the air of girlish light-heartedness, of careless gayety, that she had worn at dinner, had vanished.

"Is something still the matter?" I asked, anxiously. "I thought that you and Herbert were on good terms again, that——"

"Theo Braithe," she interrupted, in a fierce undertone, "you're by turns the cleverest and the most idiotic woman alive! Come to my room in half an hour, do you hear? Send Josette away for the night,

and come just as you are. Do you understand? Yes? If you didn't want to be up to your neck in misery, why did you kill that spider this morning? I begged you not!" And she swept away to her room.

I did as she wished, dismissing my little maid, and waiting the required half hour. When this had elapsed, I went, with lagging steps, along the gallery, ashamed of my unwillingness to listen to what I believed would prove to be but a fretful outburst of childish complaints. Upon entering her room, I found that she had already exchanged her costly toilet for a white peignoir, and her pretty fair hair rippled over her shoulders. She closed and locked the door carefully after me, and led me to the lounge at the foot of the bed, well in the centre of the room.

"There's one thing I want to say first," she began, speaking beneath her breath, as though in fear of being overheard, "and that is that I won't be reproached and vituperated. What's done is done, and I can't help it. I'm in awful trouble." The corners of her pretty mouth turned down, she looked very childish and helpless. "Carrington has proposed."

"Lilian!" I exclaimed, smiling and much relieved. "Is that all? What a foolish girl you are! I thought you liked him so much. Have you changed your mind?"

"Like him?" she cried, fiercely, "why, you fool, I love him—like, indeed!"

"Then what are you fretting over?" I demanded. "He is a charming fellow—why not say yes at once? I congratulate you, dear." I took her hand and would have kissed her, but she pushed me away, and, springing to her feet, began to pace the floor. And as I watched her lithe, free movements, I thought of the Leopards of the House.

"Say yes?" she repeated, in a passionate undertone, pouring out her words as though they had been pent

up for months, and now escaped her fevered lips almost without her volition. "Say yes at once? I wish to God I might. I did almost as much, for I asked for two weeks to think it over! Like an idiot I counted on the Death Coach to pull me through. In three days, I thought, in only three days' time I shall know who is summoned; perhaps I myself," she shuddered, "and perhaps that devil! But I reckoned without thought of his cunning; I might have known he'd manage to use me up to the very last——"

"Who, Lilian?" I asked, interrupting. "Whom do you fear?"

"Who, you fool?" she echoed, passionately. "Herbert Fayne, of course."

"I'm tired of this nonsense," I said, severely. "I can't understand why Herbert is of any importance to you. Why do you allow him to interfere between you and Mr. Carrington. He is nothing but a cousin——"

She held up her hand, imposing silence. She came close to me. "I am his wife," she said.

I broke the long stillness that fell upon the room with no questions. Before many seconds had passed, I felt that I had known this blighting secret for a dreary length of years. At last Lilian spoke again:

"It was all the fault of that old wretch who played fast and loose with us," she said, and I knew that she alluded to her great-uncle. "He swore at first that Bertie should have the money, because he was the grandson of his friend. And then that I must, because I was his grand-niece. By and by Herbert suggested that we might marry (he knew a lawyer who'd do it for him on the sly), and so both get the fortune. We did—and lost."

I roused myself from the mental inertia that had settled upon me like an evil mist. This dreadful revelation, following so swiftly upon the hour of my happiness, had deadened all my senses. I was the

eldest; I must be the one to rid Lilian of her self-inflicted burden. It was for me to act.

"Take courage, Lilian," I said, and my voice had an odd, weary inflection, despite my effort to speak cheeringly. "Herbert will release you; and Carrington, knowing that you were under age, and that it was no real marriage, only a legal ceremony—" I hesitated, my words died upon my lips. For again she had paused in her walk, close before me; and her expression was so strange that it shocked me into silence.

"Legal ceremony—no real marriage!" she repeated, sneering contempt vibrating in every tone of her sweet voice. "For Heaven's sake, don't talk that rot to me! I'm sick of him, and I hate him like poison, but I was half in love with him then, and willing enough to be his wife. All the girls wanted him, and I got him—and I wish to the Lord he'd died first! There, there's nothing to be shocked about—I don't mean to make a row getting a divorce. All I ask is to be allowed to destroy that hateful certificate—and my silly letters—and have Herbert let me alone. Then it will all be as if it had never happened, and I can marry Carrington, and be happy!"

She looked so like the portrait of the Lady Sophia as she spoke, so hard and cold, so brazen even, that, remembering the wicked career of our common ancestress, and realizing that my fair-haired sister was beginning already to follow in her footsteps, I was overpowered by a feeling of repulsion, of disgust. I rose, and going to the window leaned out into the night. I longed for a sight of the heavens; for a breath of pure air in my face; Lilian's confession had, somehow, tainted even the atmosphere of the room. But there was no night breeze bringing refreshment, no cheering sparkle of stars; instead, a pall-like blackness over everything, and a deadness in the air that stifled

me. Suddenly, as I gazed into nothingness, the gloom outside was dissipated by a flash of heat-lightning; the pale, uncanny flare illuminating the broad lawn with its elms and sycamores, and showing me the figure of a man lurking near the great tulip tree opposite the window. I turned back into the room.

"There is someone on the lawn, just across the road, under the tulip tree, Lilian," I said, softly. "Does Herbert know what you are doing?"

Before I had finished speaking she had gripped my arm nervously, gasping, "My God! have they come already?"

"Who, Lilian?" I asked. But without stopping to answer, she dragged me back to the window, and stood peering out, with frightened eyes.

"The air is damp," she said, in high, unnatural tones, as though wishing to be overheard; "I'll draw in the blinds." And she leaned from the window.

Again the lightning, playing along the horizon, made every object visible; the stretch of lawn, the Leopards of the gate, the lines of locust trees beyond. But the man was nowhere to be seen. Lilian closed the blinds softly, then turned an ashen face toward me.

"Could it have been Herbert himself?" she said. "But no, he dare not leave the house——"

"Why not?" I interrupted.

"The police," she whispered. "He was warned this morning. Oh, why do you stare at me like that, as if you'd lost your wits, Theo Braithe?"

"Lilian," I began, imperiously, though my lips trembled. But she drew me from the window before I could speak further.

"Listen," she said, softly, "and, for God's sake, don't faint, or lose your nerve. They're after Herbert, and he's got to get away, and you'll have to manage it. Don't look as if you didn't understand!

Through the By-Ways. You are the one who holds their secrets. You are the Head."

"What has he done?" I asked. My lips felt suddenly parched, I spoke with an effort; for I knew that whatever it might be, I must, as Lilian had said, help him. It was only by helping him that I might hope to protect her.

"I told him that he needn't count upon you," Lilian continued, paying no attention to my question, "for that you thought the old traditions nonsense. But he said they'd hold you now. He was in a tight place, he said, and you'd show your blood and pull him through."

"What has he done?" I repeated, coldly.

"Forged—stolen—done everything he shouldn't, the selfish wretch!"

"Forged—stolen," I said, faintly, "O Lilian!"

"He says if you'll get him out of Braithe before midnight," she went on, "he'll give me my marriage certificate—I let him keep it, like a fool—and all my letters (I wrote him silly love-sick ones, at first), and never trouble me any more. But"—she paused a moment, looking like a wild thing at bay—"if he's caught, he'll clamor for me. And my letters will be published in every yellow journal in the country! Theo," she flung herself at my feet in an agony of fear, "Theo, help me! Don't let Carrington hear! He will—will despise me. O Theo, Theo, I wish Herbert was dead!"

I could not speak; despair had made me dumb. For I thought of Etienne, to whom dishonor was brought so near, because of me. His wife's first cousin a forger, a thief! Yes, Herbert must escape; must carry his dreadful secret away with him, and—but no, he could not take it from Lilian, or me. We must keep it always; must lie down with it, get up with it, feel it upon our hearts forever! I sighed heavily, the

burden of it already weighed me down. Tears had come to Lilian, bringing relief; she began to speak more quietly.

"If you'd had the sense to read the letter father left for you, you'd have been able to help me before. That told me of Herbert's having forged. It was his forgery that cut him out of uncle's will—and my marrying him that ruined me. The old man found out everything—and told father."

She ceased speaking, absorbed in her bitter memories. And I, I knew at last why Braithe House had been closed to my father's once favorite.

"Herbert's a fool," Lilian recommenced, "for he was doing well enough for him—earning his living, at least—when his infernal vanity spoiled everything. He was in with a lot of men who make counterfeit money (he had something to do with passing it—I don't understand exactly, but it's a kind of business in its nasty way), and was getting along fairly, when he must needs ruin himself showing off at that fire. You thought him brave—and all that!" She laughed sneeringly. "It made me sick to hear you all praising him. Brave! Oh, yes. Letting women down out of windows, and pocketing their jewels. As souvenirs of the fire, I suppose!"

I sat silent, too sick at heart for words.

"His picture was put in the paper," Lilian went on, "but how that helped to let the police into his counterfeit money record, I don't know. He says they're after him about that, not about the other—and I'm nearly dead, I am, with keeping his vile secrets, and he tells me everything, yes, everything!" She again began to pace up and down, up and down, like a caged animal. "Yes," she stamped her foot—in a controlled fury that made every action, every word, more impressive—"and he's got the jewels those two fools downstairs are after."

I sank down upon the couch, feeling too weak to stand.

"Theo"—she leaned close over me—"he's got the opal, too!" Her eyes flashed, the sweet rose-pink flushed her pale cheeks, she clinched her small white hands. "The Gypsy's Opal," she said, slowly, "so sooner—or later—he's doomed."

"Where are the jewels now?" I asked, faintly. "Has he them still?"

"He says that he didn't dare keep them here," was the answer. "That he had to trust them to his confederate, Jim Wylde."

"Jim Wylde?" I exclaimed, a new horror of Herbert, in this discovery of his double villainy, sweeping over me. "Is it Herbert who has ruined Jim Wylde?" And I knew that it must have been my old playfellow whom I had seen, masked, in the chapel.

"Herbert's between two fires now," Lilian went on, not heeding, "his old friends, the counterfeiters, and the police. For if the old gang find out that he's doing something on his own account, they'll make it hot for him. There! the clock is striking eleven, it's time to go. Herbert is waiting for you now."

"Where?" I whispered.

"In your room. He said there must be some hidden door there. And in case the police came unexpectedly, they'd leave your room till the last. For Heaven's sake, don't faint—where's my vinaigrette?"

But I pushed away the dainty bottle and rose. "I am ready," I said, quietly.

"You are so awfully white, Theo! Are you sure you can go through with it?"

"I must," I said.

"Make him give you my letters," she whispered, vehemently, "before he leaves the house. And look, yourself, to see if the certificate is there."

"Yes, Lilian."

"And, Theo, just one thing more. You needn't be afraid that he'll make love to you, for he won't. He's only thinking of saving his own skin now. He said himself you'd be a burden; and that he was glad you had had more sense than he about running away. I'll go with you to your room; it may avert suspicion. And I'll wait for my letters there."

As we went along the gallery the door of little Jane's room opened softly, and the nurse came out. "I was just coming for you Mrs. Rappelle," she said. "Miss Janey can't sleep, and I think a glass of warm milk may soothe her—she had her supper at six, you know. Will you please stop with her till I come back?"

Lilian sighed heavily.

"I'll go on to your dressing-room," she said. "Don't be long."

Little Jane was in bed, the Chevalier stretched close beside her. She looked so lovely as she lay there—her golden hair streaming in soft masses over the pillow, her big blue eyes bright with sleeplessness—so sweet and pure, that I, with my new knowledge of evil, felt unfit to approach her. The Chevalier thumped his tail gently, but did not offer to move. Since he was allowed to sleep on the bed, he bore his exile from my room with exemplary patience; but he glanced at me and blinked his long brown eyes with an air of hypocritical resignation.

"Funny old Charles Stuart!" said the child, smiling. "He's really a Pretender, isn't he, Theo? Come, kneel down, and put your head here," she patted the pillow softly, "close, close to mine. Ah, how sweet your roses smell! Mustn't crush them, no. Let me kiss you," lifting the flowers, "under the rose. But I'm not quite sure I like them there to-night; they make me think of blood. Yes, Theo, blood upon your breast."

"I'll take them off, pet," I said, quickly.

"No," said little Jane, "leave them. I've nice thoughts coming now. You are a lily, Theo.

'Queen lily and rose in one.'

See, your soft neck is as white as a lily; and the rose leaves lying there make lily and rose in one."

"Fanciful little sister!" I said, caressingly.

"Yes, that's true," said the child, "and I'm sorry. My mind is as queer as my back, Theo."

"What makes you so wakeful, pussy?" I asked, anxious to change the trend of her thoughts.

"It's that awful Portent," she whispered, flushing feverishly. "The three days end at midnight—who will mount the Coach?"

"My darling," I cried, clasping her close, "my foolish little Jane! How can you worry so over that nonsensical old superstition?"

"It ought to be me," the child went on, not heeding, "for I'm sickly; or Lilian, for she's no good; but I believe it's coming for the Flower of the House. And I'm most crazy thinking about it! No, don't interrupt me, or I'll begin to cry. Talking corks up the tears, somehow. If you were afraid of anything, you'd think religious thoughts, and get soothed down. But I can't. Religion to you is like a great tall tree; and you climb up among the topmost branches, and listen to the leaves rustle and the birds sing, and forget your worries. Yes, a tree," she continued, dreamily, "a magnolia tree—full of white flowers. Do you remember ours, last spring, how lovely it looked? An oriole came one day and flashed in and out among the big white cups—you said it was drinking perfume from them. Religion is like the magnolia tree, to you. Yes, and you're like that oriole! You said it looked like a living jewel—such

pretty words, Theo!—and that's what you're like, a live jewel; a beautiful, glowing gem."

"And you are my jewel," I said, fondly, kissing her, "and my bright little bird, as well. You and I, pet, will find comfort together—and strength, and sustaining thoughts, in the beautiful Tree that shelters all."

"If it only weren't for the Deluge!" burst out poor little Jane, in a sudden wail of despair, "that awful, awful Deluge, I might. But it washes away the roots of the Tree, for me. To start a lot of people and then, because some of them were wicked, to Deluge them all to death! Yes, all. Innocent children and babies, along with the bad men and women! Now don't contradict me, Theo, for I know all about it. I've seen pictures of the Deluge—and they've given me the crawling creeps. And He saved that ridiculous old Noah, with his Shem, Ham and Japhet; yet allows college boys to make rude songs about them! College boys don't get Deluged away for poking fun at the Ark—and why not? But the ways of the Creator are hard to understand."

"Don't try to understand, my darling," I said, gently, "just believe in His goodness, His wisdom. Put your trust in Him—and have faith."

"I don't like to hurt you, Theo," said the child, patting my cheek, "and I can believe in everything lovely, when you hold me close. Pretty, pretty diamond heart!" She kissed my trinket. "Etienne's heart, Theo, yet your very own. Oh, here's nurse with my milk! Will you sing to me a little, before you go?"

Kneeling beside her bed, I chanted the beautiful old psalm, *Qui habitat.*

"Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

The child settled down among her pillows, and closed her eyes. As I softly chanted the fifth verse, beginning: "Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night," her gentle breathing told me that sleep had come, to banish all her fears. I stole quietly away.

XXVIII

I went swiftly to the door of my dressing-room; then paused, striving for the composure of heart and soul that could alone carry me through the coming ordeal. My mind was full of resentment toward the two who, under the guise of affection, had but striven to accomplish their own selfish ends. Lilian's choice of the black satin was only a precaution against the tell-tale dust, or damp, of the By-Ways; her gift of the red roses, a signal to Herbert that I had sworn to keep her secrets—and his. She had not needed to assure me of the death of Herbert's—so-called—love for me. The remembrance of his appeal for help—disguised by how many flowers of speech!—of his announcement of his speedy departure; of his graceful self-reproaches, and affected desire for forgiveness; all told me that his ephemeral passion was gone. Yet, because I knew him to be a criminal, and because I, by aiding him to escape justice, became his accomplice, the thought of being alone with him in the By-Ways brought horror.

I stood with my hand upon the knob of the door, unable to find courage to turn it.

"Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night," I repeated, under my breath—and entered.

Lilian came forward quickly to meet me. "How dared you keep me in agony so long?" she whispered, fiercely. "I'm almost mad with waiting—in suspense! He's in there"—she pointed to the closed door of my bedroom. "Go, for God's sake, and get him out of the house!"

The large room was dimly lighted; only one lamp was burning, and that turned low. At first I thought that Lilian was mistaken, that Herbert had not yet come. But as I opened a secret cupboard, seeking the lantern kept there always for those who must travel the By-Ways, he stepped from behind the tall cheval-glass. A remembrance of his admiration for my ruby flashed across my mind. Before lifting, with both hands, the heavy old-fashioned lantern, I hastily slipped off the well-loved jewel, and left it in safety behind.

I busied myself lighting the lantern, neither looking at nor greeting the man who advanced slowly toward me; yet I knew that he had changed his evening suit for one of dark tweed, that he wore a shirt of blue flannel, and that he carried a slouched hat in his hand. In spite of my efforts to steady them, my fingers trembled so that I could not accomplish my task; and Herbert, taking the lantern from me, lighted it himself. While he was thus occupied I unfastened the chain from about my throat and, re-opening the cupboard, placed the diamond heart beside my ring. That, too, must remain mine.

"What a queer old thing!" said Herbert, turning the lantern this way and that, the better to examine the quaintly carved iron frame, surmounted by the twin Leopards of Braithe.

The light through the thick, colored glass, cast a purplish-red glimmer over everything about me, making the familiar objects seem unreal, and flinging a stain upon Herbert's handsome face.

I went quickly to the ponderous mahogany armoire built against the wall, opened its door, and thrusting my hand between the silks and velvets that hung there, found and pressed a secret spring. The back of the armoire gave way. I motioned to Herbert to precede me. He did so; and I closed both outer and

inner door behind us, as we entered the By-Ways of Braithe.

We stood upon a narrow ledge of stone at the top of a steep flight of steps, that led sharply downward to the basement of the house. These steps ran side by side with the staircase that connected Etienne's bedroom and dressing-room, and were so narrow, so squeezed in between the walls, and so precipitous that they were difficult of descent.

When I had been taken by Mr. Braithe through the By-Ways, it had been a surprise to me to find them both simple in construction and limited in extent. Like the rest of the uninitiated, I had imagined that the old walls of the house were fairly honey-combed with secret passages; while in reality these mysterious hidden ways consisted, in all, but of two private exits. Any good architect, or builder, could have readily detected where the staircases leading to these were placed. Why my great-great-great-grandfather had had them made, I could not imagine; since were they exact copies of those in the English Braithe House he could not have hoped, by means of them, to have eluded his justly incensed brother. Theodore, as Head of the Family, knew their secrets better than he. But I doubted if he had been able to steal—along with its other valuables—a chart of the English Manor. I fancied that these hidden stairways had been planned, and placed, by Vivian, more from a desire to have all that his brother had than with any thought of putting them to use. I knew that they had never served any purpose—good or ill—in the time of the Revolution. Braithe House had never been occupied as headquarters by either the British or our own people.

Herbert glanced about him curiously. I forced myself to speak.

"There are two exits," I said, coldly. "One just below; one under the portico. Pray choose."

"The one under the portico, please, Theo," he answered, quietly. "I want to get to the boat-house—if I can."

He took off his coat, throwing it across his arm, and slipping the ring of the lantern over his wrist, began the descent.

As I followed I noted, with fresh repulsion, how carefully he braced his hands against the walls as he moved slowly downward, knowing that this was done for me. Did my foot slip I should fall against him, and thus avoid injury. Since he had chosen to ally himself with the scum of the earth, it would have pleased me better had he treated me as, I suppose, such creatures do treat women. This survival of his early training, of the manners that had come to him with his gentle birth, disgusted me. His care for my physical well-being, when he was doing such cruel wrong to my heart and soul, shocked every finer feeling within me.

It was hot to suffocation between the thick walls on that stifling July night. Yet as I crawled stealthily—like a guilty thing—past Etienne's room, I shivered as with a chill; so cold was my heart with the dread of discovery. I dared not think of the morrow, when I must meet him; dared not allow my imagination to conjure up the scenes that must follow this night flight. The questions that would assuredly be asked—the lies that I must tell and act. No, I forced my mind to concentrate itself upon the need of the moment. I must think only of getting Herbert away; must face each emergency, fight each danger, as it came—and not look forward.

The ladder-like stairs turned where those leading to Etienne's room ended, and a second sharp flight took us to the lowest story. Under the library and drawing-room were the cellars of the house, while the rest of the basement held the kitchen and servants' offices.

Herbert looked on with keen interest while I slipped aside the heavy bolt of the door leading into the cellar, and, opening it cautiously, stepped through. When closed behind us this door was not visible; its heavy woodwork having been carefully incrusted with bits of stone, it could not be distinguished from the wall of which it formed a part. The air of the cellar was damp, and again I shivered. Before I could prevent him, Herbert had flung his coat over my shoulders, and buttoned it at my throat.

"Don't waste time taking it off, Theo," he said, quickly, as I would have removed it. "I shan't go a step further till you consent to keep it on."

Realizing the futility of remonstrance, of any effort on my part, I submitted; although the touch of the coat was repulsive to me, since it was his. As I moved on hastily—the more hastily because of this fresh indignity that I must endure—I became conscious that the coat was fragrant with the scent of sandal-wood, and wondered why.

Keeping as near the east wall as possible, I hurried on. Herbert still carried the lantern and, utilizing his soft hat as a screen, so managed that its dull red rays shone out in front alone. It was necessary to enter the wine cellar in order to reach the exit under the portico; and as I sought and found the key hidden away for those who used the By-Ways, I thought I heard something—or someone—moving in the large cellar we had just left. At the same moment the purplish-red light from the lantern disappeared, showing that Herbert shared my alarm. I held my breath, listening intently. But my heart throbbed so painfully that I could hear nothing else. What seemed an eternity passed. Then Herbert spoke.

"A false alarm," he whispered. "Probably a rat scrambling about. Courage, Theo! we are quite safe."

And again the sullen rays from the lantern made threatening shadows start into evil shapes.

With trembling fingers I unlocked the door of the wine cellar, and, entering, closed and relocked it with nervous haste. I was sick with terror. A feverish heat ran through my veins, driving away the chill of the moment before. Yet I dared not take Herbert's coat from my shoulders. He now stood in the middle of the cellar, holding the uncovered lantern high, and gazing about him with an air of almost affectionate interest.

"What a jolly old place it is!" he said, in an undertone; "uncle used to bring me down here and tell tales of its past glories. This is just the light to see it in, too. Looks as though it were aglow with the rich Burgundy those shelves are groaning under. I shouldn't mind a glass of Burgundy now. Hold on a minute, Dolly! You shall have some, too. There's a corkscrew in my knife."

"No, no," I whispered, vehemently, "you must not stop."

I went quickly to one corner, pressed my way in between two casks, and, counting the stones of the wall behind them, drew out the one that concealed the bolt of the hidden door. "Come, Herbert," I commanded.

He followed unwillingly. We stood beneath the portico, whose sides Old Vivian had had walled up in order to gain this exit, for a door, like the two we had already passed through, here led outward. When I had made ready to open this, I felt that my task was accomplished. My journey with Herbert was ended.

"Please give me the—the letters," I whispered—I hated to mention them—"and take this." I unbuttoned his coat, but he caught my hand and stopped me, before I could throw it off.

"Not yet," he said. "Keep it on till I see if the coast is clear. The letters are in one of its pockets.

You don't believe me? There, look yourself." He took a packet from a side pocket as he spoke, opened it, and, holding up the lantern, showed me that it contained the letters. I saw Lilian's handwriting upon the envelopes. "Best make sure," he went on, with a sneering smile. And, opening one, he drew out the certificate of marriage. I was convinced. "If you'll hold the end of this," he went on, taking a roll of ribbon from his pocket, "and play Ariadne to my Theseus, I'll have a peep outside. Now, Theo," as I began to object, "do be sensible! How can I find my way back, in the dark? For you'll have to cover up the lantern." Seeing that I still hesitated, he added, speaking very gently, "I should hate to shoot on sight, Dolly, but I must if there is no other way of retreat open. I won't be taken alive."

This was the last straw. My overstrained nerves almost gave way. It had never occurred to me that, in order to make good his escape, Herbert would not hesitate to commit murder. A deadly faintness came over me. I fought it down. My nerves must not, should not, fail me now, when the lives of others depended upon me. Herbert spoke again. His voice seemed to come from a great distance, yet I knew that he stood close beside me.

"Will you hold the ribbon—dear?" For answer I put out a trembling hand.

"Let me wind it about your wrists, Dolly," he whispered. "If you dropped it you might not be able to find it in the dark."

I submitted, and in another moment was alone. Now and again a pale glimmer, flashing through the partially opened door, told me that the heat-lightning was still at play. I stood motionless; waiting—in dumb anguish—for the pistol shot that would tell me that my worst fears were realized. What appeared hours of agony passed. Then the ribbon jerked sud-

denly, and Herbert re-entered, closing the door behind him, and uncovering the lantern. Its baleful light gleamed upon a revolver that he thrust into his hip-pocket, and showed me his smiling face.

"No go, Dolly!" he whispered, gayly, as he unwound the ribbon from my wrists. "We're not far enough from the madding crowd. Praie is enjoying the evening air on the path to the boat-house, and there's a light in the library. We must try the north side of the house; the trees grow thick there. It's just like old times. I feel as though we were children again, playing hide-and-seek!" He laughed softly, as though delighting in the excitement of the hour; and, as we retraced our steps through the cellars, he led the way. The contrivances of Vivian were but clumsy, easily managed affairs, to his quick-witted descendant.

To the ignorant the cellar under the library appeared to end where the great chimney of that room had its foundation. But back of it there was here, as above, a small room, at the foot of the secret stairs by means of which Herbert and I had reached the cellar. This we now entered. I had the dreadful feeling of having already spent years in this vain attempt to rid myself of my detested companion; a nightmare sensation of being obliged to remain shut away with him in these gloomy By-Ways forever.

"What a close little place!" said Herbert, in a carefully lowered voice. "No means of ventilation that I can see. I'm glad there's a bench; do sit down." As he drew out his handkerchief to dust off the heavy wooden settle—the only piece of furniture the room contained—he paused, bent down, ran his finger along the seat; then asked, quickly, when I had visited the By-Ways last. "Have you been here very lately, Theo?"

I shook my head.

"Since uncle died?" he persisted.

"No," I said, shortly.

"Then someone else has," he continued, speaking slowly, "for the dust on this is very light. Does Rappelle know the secrets of the House.

"Not to my knowledge," I replied.

"Someone knows them," said Herbert, musingly, "and the question is—who? But sit down, Dolly; you are white from fatigue."

"No," I said, coldly, mounting the steps that led up to the narrow door of exit, and preparing to draw its bolt; "you had best go."

"Not yet," he answered, quickly; "I've changed my mind. I'll give Praie a chance to get sleepy first. There's time enough—and I'm not anxious for a row."

He came to me, and, taking my unwilling hand in his, drew me back to the bench. I dared not resist. Etienne might already have entered his room, just above us; and if, as Herbert suspected, he had mastered Vivian's simple mysteries, our danger of being discovered was great.

"I can see that Lilian has been poisoning your mind against me," said Herbert, in a plaintive undertone, as he sat down beside me. "How you can believe that she has sufficient sense to judge anybody's actions, I don't understand. Her mind is fairly eaten up with selfishness and silly superstitions. Lilian is a fool!"

I sat silent, straining my ears for sounds in the room overhead. There came a sullen mutter from without. I started nervously.

"Only thunder, Dolly," said Herbert, reassuringly, "and it's very far off. No storm is coming this way. What did Lilian tell you about me?"

"Everything," I answered, briefly, hoping that this revelation of my knowledge of his evil deeds might still his tongue.

"Just like her!" he ejaculated. "I might have

known she would. But I'm not so black as I am painted, Dolly, I swear I'm not! Passing a little counterfeit money isn't such a bad business as you think. Shop-keepers, and such people, cheat so like the devil that they ought to get let in for a few losses once in a while, just to serve them out. As for the jewels—ah!" He ceased speaking, staring at my left hand. "So you wouldn't trust me, Dora? I think you might have spared me that— Why," his carefully lowered voice vibrated as if with sudden excitement, "your wedding-ring is gone. O Dolly!"

His eyes flashed, he watched me eagerly. I looked at my hand. It was, indeed, quite bare. In my hurry I had pulled off my wedding-ring along with the ruby. Herbert turned his head away.

"It is time to go," he said, in a constrained tone, pulling out his watch. "Twenty minutes of twelve."

This seemed almost incredible to me. Surely we had been in these By-Ways for many hours! I glanced over his shoulder. He had spoken truly—it was but twenty minutes of twelve.

"I must ask you to hold this again," Herbert went on, "since I may have to come back."

"Come back?" I echoed, faintly.

"Yes," he said, coldly, "but I don't expect to. Of course, if you would rather I forced my way—" I held out my hand for the ribbon. "Both, please," he whispered. "I must wind it around your wrists, as before."

I submitted. Thank God the end was near. He leaned down, his bent head between me and his busy fingers. Suddenly I felt his arms about my waist.

"Herbert!" I exclaimed, in a fierce whisper.

"It's all right," he interrupted, and, before I well knew what he was doing, he took something from one of the pockets of the coat that still hung over my shoulders and shook it out.

"The palmist's scarf!" I said, and would have stretched out my hands for it. They refused to obey me. Herbert had knotted the ribbon wound firmly around my wrists about my waist. I was powerless. Before I could cry out for aid, he had silenced my lips with the silken scarf, binding it close across my mouth.

The whole air was fragrant with sandal-wood, and as I reeled, faint with the horror of my position, with my desperate struggle for freedom, and for breath, I seemed to be sinking into a sea of perfume. Herbert caught me, drew me down upon the bench, and, his arm around me, began to fan me with the palmist's gift, that still swung at my side.

"You can breathe perfectly, darling," he whispered, tenderly, "if you'll just have the sense to realize it. There, that's my own clever Dolly," as my breathing grew less labored. "I knew you would not faint."

The fan swayed to and fro. The face of the Buddha appeared from beneath the rippling surface of the water.

"I shall take you with me, dear," murmured Herbert, "just as I have planned to do all along. I never meant to leave Braithe alone, Dolly."

I glanced about me wildly. I prayed passionately for discovery. I no longer cared to protect Lilian, or to save Herbert from disgrace. I thought only of myself. The ugly purplish-red glow from the lantern —swung high now, on a hook beside the door of exit— cast its hateful stain upon the stone walls of the narrow room. I was so near Etienne—yet shut away from him, perhaps forever. As hope died, I thought I heard someone moving in the tiny passage outside. The faintest rustling, as if unaccustomed fingers were trying—very cautiously—to press the spring of the door. Did I imagine it, or did the heavy door move?

"I took the jewels for you, dear." Herbert spoke

slowly as he made his strange defence. "It won't hurt those people—they're so rich. It will be an amusement to them to buy new ones. I'll use the gems to make you comfortable. We'll build a Braithe House of our own some day, Dolly—like Vivian and Sophia. In another country—Canada, perhaps. I dare say he had to use a little gentle force to persuade her to come here with him. Did you throw away your wedding-ring as a sign to me that you were ready? I mean to believe so."

Was the door ajar? I stared at it until my overstrained eyes blurred with the effort. I must rest them—to see the better. I looked at the fan. Herbert moved it slowly, languorously. The lilies of the pond seemed swaying gently—the full lips of the god to curve in a dreamy smile.

"I made Lilian get your opal for me," continued Herbert. "I was determined you shouldn't lose that. I have it around my neck now. But it's time to go."

He crushed me to him suddenly, kissing my cheek. As he released me, a leaf from the roses on my breast fell to the floor.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "such tell-tales must be got rid of." He lifted the coat, unpinned the roses, then pressed his lips where their petals had lain. Where my little sister's kisses had blessed me, his now branded. And I felt as though I were going mad, in my impotence—in my awful despair.

He lifted his face at last—white, even in the red light of the lantern. "I can't understand why you don't love me," he whispered, passionately, "when I worship you so!"

He took the rose from my hair and thrust it, with the others, into his breast. Then, still holding me fast, drew me with him up the steps to the door, and—after extinguishing the light—opened it, lifted me in his arms, and carried me out into the night.

The atmosphere was still hot, oppressive; a death-like hush was over everything, save when—at long intervals—there came the dull rumble of distant thunder. The darkness was intense and Herbert paused, uncertain of his path. Then a faint flash of lightning made the shapely trunks of the surrounding sycamores and tulip trees stand boldly out, and showed the grove of arbor-vitæ on the edge of the bank beyond. Behind us loomed up, black and sullen, the windowless end of the north wing. The light vanished, but Herbert—as if still seeing—bore me forward, threading his way, without apparent difficulty, between the trees. And, even in my wretchedness, I could not but marvel at his great strength, for he carried me with almost careless ease.

"Hide your face against my shoulder, Dolly," he whispered, as the pleasant pungent odor of the arbor-vitæ told me that we had reached the grove. "These trees grow close; their branches may hurt you." And he moved slowly, shielding me with arm and hand, as he began to descend the bank.

My eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness. We were in a little glade, its sides topped by trees; below us the river. Herbert set me down gently, needing a moment's rest. But his arms were still around me, and I felt his lips upon my hair. I strove to draw away. He but pressed me closer, murmuring that he loved me, and would hold me fast.

"That you, Bert?" said a voice very near us.

My heart stood still, then beat with suffocating rapidity, for I was saved! Close beside me, though hardly visible in the darkness, was my old playmate, James Wylde. I struggled to speak, to free myself, but Herbert held me firmly, and my words were but a moan.

"What are you doing here?" Herbert asked,

sharply, in evident surprise. "Is the boat below? Then don't wait." And quickly, dexterously, he turned, so that he was between me and Jim, adding, "Be off! and meet me later, where I told you." His words were followed by the soft rustle of retreating footsteps.

I was sick with despair. But I said to myself, fiercely, that the river was wide, and long, and deep; and that before Herbert had gone far he should be without a companion. The lightning, playing along the distant horizon, now showed me Jim's tall figure at the top of the side slope. I saw him turn and look back, as if at us. Then the light died away, and Herbert, again lifting me in his arms, recommenced his journey downward. Suddenly Jim's voice struck sharply through the gloom:

"Who've you got with you, Bert Fayne?"

"Nobody," said Herbert, shortly.

"That's a lie," was the quick retort. "Who is it?"

I felt Herbert start. Then he controlled himself. "You've done your part," he said, with forced good-nature, "and if I choose to take a pretty face with me, what's that to you?"

He spoke as though I had been some young girl of the neighborhood, who had pleased his idle fancy. And I knew from Jim's half-grumbled apology that he was sorry he had interfered. But the faint glimmer of the lightning came again, and his words died upon his lips, for he saw me.

"By God, it's Theo!" he cried, fiercely, seizing Herbert by the shoulder and twisting him sharply around. "You leave her go, Bert Fayne!"

"Damn your impertinence!" said Herbert, with equal fierceness. "How dare you meddle with our affairs? Get out of my way."

He tried to struggle forward, but Jim held him fast. "You wait till she says she wants to go off with

you," he said, hoarsely. "I'll never believe it till then!"

Herbert, knowing that my swathed mouth would, if seen, bear witness against him, strove to conceal my face; but the fitful light from across the river made his effort vain.

"You've gagged her," said Jim, in an awed whisper. "You're the biggest devil I know!" He tore the scarf from my face, and caught Herbert by the throat. "You'd choke her, would you, damn you?" he panted through his set teeth. "Try how you like it yourself!"

Herbert staggered back, lost his hold—and I was free. With frantic haste, my bound hands crippling every movement, I stumbled back up the bank, on into the black shadows of the grove. How might I make my way through the trees without my hands? Alas! I knew that even could I do this, and succeed in reaching the house, the By-Ways, because of my helpless condition, would be closed to me. I might attract Lilian's attention—calling softly to her beneath the window of my dressing-room—and, with her help, steal in. But no, the house was watched. If I were seen, my hands bound, Herbert's coat upon my shoulders— No, I would re-enter by the By-Ways or not at all.

As I paused at the top of the bank, my mind distracted by its harassing thoughts—a hunted creature, not knowing which way to turn—a heavy thud from below told me that one, if not both, of the combatants had fallen. If Herbert had conquered, he would come for me—would search everywhere. I held my breath; the effort to hear what was taking place became a positive pain.

"Courage, O Diamond among beautiful women!" said a voice from out of the darkness, and I felt deft fingers unknotting the ribbon at my waist.

"The palmist!" I gasped, a great sob rising in my

throat, in my joy at my release—in my misery at my position. Discovered thus, by a stranger!

"And Felix Fadd, Mrs. Rappelle," said my unseen companion, ceasing to use fantastic language, directly it had served its purpose and quieted my alarm. Then as my hands were freed, he added: "Give me the coat." I obeyed quickly. "And take this." A match-box was placed in my trembling fingers. "The light from the library will guide you now," he said, gravely, "and the door into the By-Ways is ajar. Go swiftly, Mrs. Rappelle."

All the strange happenings of the night had been so unreal to me that I accepted the presence of the palmist, and the disclosure of his identity, without question or surprise. I murmured a few broken words of thanks, and hastened back to the house. As I reached it and was closing the secret door behind me, the metallic voice of the old clock cut through the heavy air like a knife. I listened, counting. Twelve strokes. Twenty minutes had seemed a lifetime!

While hurriedly lighting the lantern I heard the sharp report of a revolver. Shuddering, I hastened up the ladder-like stairs, on, through the armoire, to my room. Running to its eastern window, turning the swivels of its closed blinds, I stared out into the night. The light from the library had vanished. Was it fancy, or did I really hear the sound of footsteps, moving quickly toward the grove?

The rain had come. It fell with dull, unceasing patter upon the roof of the portico.

Who had fallen, after that pistol shot—James Wylde? And who was outside, in the pall-like darkness—Etienne?

XXIX

"Theo?" said an impatient voice from my dressing-room, "Theo—are you there? When did you come in? What was that pistol shot?" And Lilian, tip-toeing across the room, joined me at the window. "Why are you looking out, you can't see in this darkness— Oh, how awful!" as the lightning illuminated the short stretch of grass below the window, the great trees, the wide river, and a little group of men slowly mounting the steps of the portico. "Theo! have they caught him? Oh, what shall I do; what shall I—" she broke off, turning upon me fiercely. "The letters?" she whispered, feverishly. "The letters—where are they?"

I gave them to her, and told her rapidly what had happened.

"Herbert may have been shot—he may be dead!" she gasped. "Oh, if that's only true! Quick, get off this scarf." It still hung about my throat. "Make yourself presentable before you're seen. Your hair is coming down, there's a long rope of it hanging over your shoulder. Hush! What was that? If Herbert isn't dead, I shall go mad! I'm almost crazy now, sitting all alone, waiting, waiting, in this dreadful room. All its silken roses and soft rugs can't cover up its horrors. It's full of dead people; Lydia—ah!"—she clutched me nervously—"what's that moving in the corner?" She pointed across the room, staring, white-faced, at the high four-post bedstead with its rose-strewn hangings. "Oh, I see now, nothing but those

curtains waving," she said in a relieved voice. "But the room is so dark. I'll turn up the lamp."

I stopped her. "No, no," I said, hastily; "if they think I am asleep, they may not disturb me."

"By 'they,' you mean Etienne?"

"Yes, Lilian," I said.

We stood together by the window, in the dimly lighted room, listening breathlessly. It seemed to me that I could hear people moving about in the library, the murmur of hushed voices, the laying down of a heavy burden. But my imagination was so fevered that I could not trust my own senses. I asked Lilian if she heard anything.

"I can't tell," she said, in a terrified whisper. "I've strained my ears so long, listening for you from the dressing-room (I couldn't stand waiting in here), that they're full of noises—rustlings, whisperings, footsteps —ah! somebody's coming now——"

But no one came.

"You had better go to your room," I said, striving for composure, "and to bed. You can rest, if you can't sleep. There is no use of your staying here with me."

"No," she whimpered, "you're worse than nobody; white as a ghost, your eyes caverns, and that coil of hair, like a great black snake, hanging over your shoulder. You are awful looking! Theo!" she stared at me strangely, "your wedding-ring is gone: What a terrible omen! Where is it? Lost—or what?"

As she ceased speaking the secret panel slid aside and Etienne entered.

Lilian edged away from me, slipping quickly through the shadows till she had put the width of half the room between us; then paused, at the foot of the bed, as though curiosity had conquered fear. Etienne gave us no greeting, but, going to the lamp, turned it high, lighted the candles on the tall chimney-piece,

and then confronted me. His face was colorless; his hair and loose smoking-jacket of black velvet were glistening with moisture. I stepped forward to go to him, then stood still, daunted by the expression of mingled hatred and contempt in his brilliant eyes. He scanned me from head to foot, taking in every detail of my disordered dress.

"I am here, madam," he said slowly, and his low voice was terrible in its bitter scorn, "to tell you that your lover is dead."

Lilian uttered a low cry, but Etienne did not notice her. I think he did not even see her, for his passion made him blind to all save me.

"His theft had been discovered," he continued, in the same even tone, "but it was thought that he could not escape; since you, and you only—it was supposed —knew the By-Ways of Braithe. No one imagined that my wife would help this man, although he were her cousin, to get away with his spoils. As for suspecting that the thief was her lover——"

"Etienne!" I cried, imploringly, then checked the words on my lips, not daring to begin a defence for fear of involving Lilian, and so breaking my oath.

He waited a moment, and finding that I said nothing further, spoke himself.

"Answer," he said, sternly, "and don't attempt to deceive me. Did you, or did you not, guide Herbert Fayne through the By-Ways to-night? Yes or no?"

I bowed my head, I could not speak.

"Did you enter them from this room?"

Again I made a motion in acquiescence.

"How long were you in them?" he demanded.

I was silent.

"Answer," he said, fiercely.

"A half hour," I faltered.

He laughed harshly. "A half hour!" he repeated. "A half hour! And I suppose you would have me

believe—" He broke off, his quick eyes had spied the absence of my rings. "At least," he said, looking at me strangely, "you had the decency to leave your wedding-ring behind you. I knew from the first," he went on, slowly, "that it meant little to you; but, in my blind folly, I believed you respected what it stood for. And so, to a certain extent, you must have; since you would not wear that symbol of honor when—" He did not finish his sentence; it was as though he could not, as if the words would not pass his lips.

"Those men downstairs," he said, presently, "are wondering how the secret exits were discovered. Not one of them would dream of questioning the immaculate purity of the lovely Mrs. Rappelle!" Again he laughed. "You have so befooled them, that were they to be told the truth, that you were the guide and companion of that villain—that you would have fled with him to-night, they would either not believe it or they would find some excuses for you still."

He pointed at my satin, a derisive smile twisting his lips. I looked down. The long train was stained with grass and mud, where it had been trampled upon during that short struggle under the trees.

"Lies will not serve you, you see," he said, and as he spoke he drew a handful of crumpled rose leaves from his pocket, and held them toward me in his open palm. "These were found upon your lover's breast—I saw them, earlier, against your own. I wanted to kiss the white neck they rested on, but denied myself, while he——"

He was silent an instant, then his passion, kept thus far in check, broke its bonds. He flung the fragrant petals from him as if they had been poisonous live things, a dark red suffused his rigid face, his eyes blazed.

"You let me hold you in my arms and kiss your

lips," he cried, furiously, "when you were planning to disgrace me! You fooled me with the pretence that you were learning to love me, but the better to put me off my guard!"

I tried to speak; strove to tell him that I had wished Herbert to escape because of the Braithe honor. I could not force myself to voice this falsehood, knowing too well that but for my oath I would have carried my trouble straight to him. As I stood silent, like a guilty thing, he suddenly held up before me the opal on its diamond chain. The great gem seemed shot through with flames of green and blue; it was resplendent, surpassing the diamonds in its wealth of color.

"This you clasped about your lover's throat," he cried, his voice hoarse with passion, "then forced your innocent sister to bear the blame of its loss—wanton!"

He hurled words and jewels at me. Both struck upon my breast, but the cruel insult cut deep into my heart. And I caught the opal, the Gypsy's Opal, my mother's opal, and pressed it close, close to the wound; as if the mere touch of the gen—glowing now, like a heart on fire—might bring me ease and healing.

Etienne stood silent, regarding me with sombre eyes. He had regained control of himself.

"You seem pleased to have recovered your treasure," he said, at last. "Doubtless you contemplate using it again as a love token. Perhaps I have wronged you in supposing that you thought of leaving Braithe, with its comforts"—he glanced about the luxurious room—"for a haphazard life with Fayne. You may have intended—after a half hour of farewells in the By-Ways—to return to enjoy my wealth and the shelter of my honest name."

These continued insults stung me to action. I lifted my head haughtily. I looked at him steadily. "I will go to-morrow," I said. Nothing, I vowed to myself, should keep me under his roof another day.

"You will remain," he replied—his voice was steeped in bitterness—"and, to the world, appear as my honored wife. You have not lost your beauty, and other men will envy me my privileges."

I felt as though sullied by his dreadful words, as if I could not endure this torture longer. I looked pleadingly, entreatingly, at Lilian. If she would but speak and right me in his sight—not that I could ever forgive him, could ever forget his insults. Lilian stood, eyes downcast, her pretty fair hair floating over her white peignoir, the picture of lovely, girlish innocence and sorrow.

"In a certain way," Etienne went on, "I love you still. For although I have discovered that my idol's aristocratic, high-arched feet are of clay, they are very charming little feet. You are a true Braithe, and as such out of place on a pedestal; but to while away a man's time when— Oh, my God!" He ceased speaking, turned away, and, leaning against the high chimney-piece, covered his face with his hands.

"I will take the child," I said, steadily, "and go tomorrow. I will never forgive you, and never return."

"Theo!" exclaimed Lilian, softly.

I raised my tired eyes and looked at her, and she knew that my decision was made. Then she advanced slowly toward me and spoke—for how might she fare did Janey and I go?

"Etienne," she said, gently, "dear Etienne!"

He uncovered his haggard face and stared at her, as though for the first time aware of her presence in the room; but he did not speak.

"Dear Etienne," her voice was exquisite in its sweetness, "aren't you too hard on poor Theo? I'm sure she meant no harm."

My heart sank within me. I had not known how much I had hoped for help, until I realized that it

was not to be looked for from her. Nothing, I saw, would induce her to tell of her marriage to Herbert; at all costs she would keep that a secret, and so win Carrington.

"What do you know of such matters?" said Etienne, wearily. "Go to your room, Lilian; this is no place for innocent girls."

"But, dear Etienne," she said, still more gently, "you are really unkind to Theo. She could not let a Braithe be dishonored——"

"Why didn't she come to me?" he demanded, with sudden fierceness. "She knew I was wax in her hands, that if she wanted him screened I'd have bought him off if it had cost every cent I had. Oh, she knew her power well. There, go, you mustn't stay here."

He spoke to Lilian, but he looked at me, and there was a great anguish in his eyes. She was silent for a moment, and I knew that she was reviewing her chances with Carrington; asking herself if he would best approve her throwing in her lot with me, or admire her more did she remain quietly at Braithe with Etienne. It was a difficult question, her pretty brows puckered in anxiety, for a false step now might ruin all. Mr. Carrington had always liked me—but he believed in wives staying at home. I saw that she still held the packet of letters—the letters that would restore my good name if she would but show them—in her hand. But her arm hung by her side, and the lace of her sleeve concealed both hand and package.

I stood near the tall cheval-glass, whose gleaming surface reflected the brightly lighted room, with its three silent occupants. Lilian, in her floating white négligé; Etienne in his rain-bespattered velvet coat; and I, in my disordered dress—the shining satin blurred with mud stains, my hair uncoiled, and the splendid jewels blazing against my aching heart. We were a strange trio.

Lilian began to speak. She had chosen her part—what would she say?

"I hope you may be mistaken, Etienne," she said; "but if it is as you fear, if poor Theo has done wrong—" She ceased speaking, she stared into the depths of the great mirror, her face grew haggard, ashen. "Ah!" she gasped, shrinking back, her white lips twitching, a look of awful fear in her dilated eyes, "Lydia! Don't let her touch me—in her shroud!" And flinging up her arms as if to ward off some approaching horror, she fell senseless where she stood.

I ran to her and, kneeling, lifted her head upon my lap. I felt that I must ask aid of Etienne. I hated to speak to him, but I forced down my anger, my pride.

"Etienne," I almost whispered, "she has fainted—bring water, please."

He did not answer. I heard the rustle of paper. I looked up. He was by the table that held the lamp, rapidly examining the letters, that must have been flung almost at his feet, by Lilian's wild motion of despair. I held my breath, I dared neither speak nor move, for he was reading the marriage certificate. He read it deliberately, slowly, as if in fear of making some mistake; then selected, with careful examination of their dates, two letters, and read them through. He turned and looked at me.

"You were her cat's-paw?" he asked, in a low voice, pointing at Lilian.

"Yes," I said, wearily.

"You couldn't trust me?"

"I was under oath," I said.

"To get these back?" he demanded.

"Yes, yes—and not to tell. But get me water, please, and help me bring her to."

I spoke impatiently—for of what use were explanations now, when his doubts had proved his love worthless?

"These were the price of his safe conduct from the house?" he persisted, methodically retying the letters, and putting them into his pocket.

"Yes," I again answered. "Ah! she is coming to herself, I think——"

"She shan't stay here," he cried, with sudden anger. And snatching her up before I well knew what he would do, he called to me to open the door, carried her along the gallery to her room, and almost flung her upon the bed.

"You are not to touch her," he said, imperiously; "do you understand? Merle shall wake her maid, and she can attend to her. Come back to your room, you have——"

"Theo!" cried Lilian, faintly. "I want Theo. Ah!" as I leaned over her, "where is—she?" Lifting herself feebly, she looked about her in terror, but finding that she was in her own room, said, sighing, "Then it was only a dream."

The next moment she was searching for her letters, crying out that I had fooled her, played her false. Etienne had gone, as I supposed, for the maid; but while I was striving to soothe her, yet not to tell what had become of the letters, he returned.

"I have your letters," he said, sternly, "and shall keep them until you behave yourself. Drink this"—he held a wineglass to her lips—"and stop tormenting Theo for a few hours, at least."

Trembling, sobbing like a frightened child, she obeyed, but insisted that I should remain with her. I did so, paying no heed to Etienne's remonstrances. The sleeping draught was a powerful one—Etienne had measured it out with no light hand—and in a few moments her deep breathing told me that I was no longer needed.

Before the maid came I had sufficiently recovered myself to think of appearances. I hastily knotted up

my hair, but the long train of my gown bore marks of rough usage that would be hard to conceal from a sharp-eyed *femme de chambre.* As I turned the light low, I thought of Josette's wonder when she should see the state of the satin; and sighed as I realized what a tissue of falsehoods must be woven, to hang over the doings of that night. I went to my dressing-room, and, putting on a wrapper, began my task of removing the stains at once. I felt odd, unlike myself; my head and eyes burning, my brain as if on fire. I repeated, over and over again, Etienne's cruel words, as if to stamp them indelibly upon my mind. I made no allowance for the mad jealousy that had prompted them, or for his hot temper; I refused to remind myself of the many kindnesses I, and mine, had received at his hands. I had but one desire, to wound him as deeply as he had wounded me—I, who had never before wished to hurt anyone!

Presently I heard someone moving in the adjoining room and Etienne entered. I did not raise my eyes, but, the train of the satin across my knee, continued my task as if too much absorbed to notice that he stood near. He sighed, then seated himself beside me. My heart began to beat violently, painfully; my hands trembled; I but made a pretence of working. He took the gown from me, freeing my fingers gently as I would have clung to it, and flung it aside.

"Don't touch me," I cried, passionately, striving to release my hands that he held firmly in his own; "you have made me hate you!"

"You can't forgive me, Theo?" he said.

"No," I cried, the hot color surging into my white cheeks, my eyes flashing as I turned and looked him in the face. "I had an affection for you, do you understand? I had grown fond of you. I trusted you, believed in you! Yes, believed in you so entirely that had anyone, had all the world, cried out that you

had done wrong, even had appearances shown you to be guilty, I would have sworn that people and circumstances spoke falsely, yes, lied! So great was my faith."

My voice sank as I spoke these last words; tears sprang to my fevered eyes, ran over, plashed down upon his hands folded close on mine.

"My darling!" he murmured. Then said, firmly, "I will win it back."

"No," I sobbed, "you cannot. It is dead."

"I can never forgive myself," he said, sadly, and again he sighed. He lifted my hand, and put back both my wedding-ring and the great ruby. I knew that he could have found them only by replacing the old lantern—forgotten by me in my excitement—and that he, too, held the wearisome secrets of the House.

"You feel as you did at first," he asked; "that these are fetters?"

"Yes," I answered, not sparing him. "And I must again begin a life of pretence. Janey must not know that I am unhappy. It would hurt her."

"Theo!" he cried. His voice showed how my words cut him. Springing to his feet he walked restlessly about the room, but paused at last before my dressing-table. "Fadd gave me these just now," he said, gloomily, taking my lost jewels from his pocket and heaping them in a gleaming mass. "And the others are all found, too. He—Fayne—had them concealed about him."

"Was he—shot?" I asked, faintly.

"I thought you knew," said Etienne, slowly, "that Wylde choked him to death."

I sat silent. A great horror held me dumb. Herbert was dead, and James Wylde a murderer—because of me. At last one fear dominated all others, and forced me into speech.

"James Wylde," I whispered, "have they caught him?"

"No," said Etienne, shortly, then added: "He got away in the darkness—and I am not sorry."

I looked up, our eyes met, and I knew that Mr. Fadd had stood my friend, by telling my story for me.

"Yes," said Etienne, as though reading my unspoken question in my eyes, "Fadd was in the By-Ways, with you. He was prepared to shoot Fayne, did he reach the boat—but Wylde came. I did not give Fadd the secrets of the House. He discovered them. As for me—I bought them, with the Manor." He was silent a long moment. "You will wear these—sometimes?" He pointed to the gems that sparkled in the lamplight.

"Oh, yes," I said, indifferently.

"And this?" he held up the diamond heart.

"Yes," I said.

"For the sake of the child?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Theo," he said, earnestly, "won't you tell me what I can do to make things easier for you? Would you like to go away for a time—just Janey and you?"

"Yes!" I faltered, my tears beginning to flow fast, "just Janey and I—and our Charles Stuart."

"So be it," said Etienne, quietly, and he left the room.

And I, I went into my oratory, and wore out the night in prayers for forgiveness. Might God be merciful to me—and to my erring cousin. Might he protect, and pardon, the poor fugitive, James Wylde.

XXX

Herbert was buried near the chapel, as had always been his wish. And with all honor; since he was believed to have met his death bravely, in an attempt to prevent the jewel thieves from carrying off their plunder. The burglars had hidden their booty in the underbrush by the river, and returning to seek it had been discovered by Herbert. Although alone, and unarmed, he had fearlessly attacked them—and so lost his life. This Mr. Praie told all who asked for an account of the affair; and newspaper reporters came from far and near.

So for pall, Herbert had a tapestry of falsehoods, and as shroud, a mask and domino of lies.

James Wylde never returned home. When the war with Spain broke out he enlisted, and ended the brief span of his reckless life while fighting for his country. Herbert had not confided any of the stolen jewels to his keeping, so he was never sought for.

"My Jim was like a spirituous horse," said poor Mrs. Gill, weeping profusely, "an' I drawed the curb too tight on him, I guess. When he was mad he was like me; his wits turned tipsy-turvy, an' he done extryordinary crazy things. Anyways," she added, drying her eyes and striving for composure, "he couldn't never have been totally happy, seeing you, Miss Theo, was born a Braithe, and not just a plain farmer's daughter like himself—and married, too, to an honorary gentleman as good as gold!"

Mr. Fadd's interest had been aroused when Mrs. Strong, returning from her evening at Braithe House

in a state of painful excitement, had given not only an account of the tableau from Faust, with its ending, but had told him stories of the Braithes and of my opal, as well. This interest had been added to, the next morning; since it was then, when he was calling at the Manor, that the robbery was discovered. The theft of the jewels, coming so shortly after the disappearance of the opal, led Mr. Fadd to suspect that the thief was not far away. He asked permission to come secretly to Braithe, and to assist in the search for a clue; suggesting, also, that his knowledge of palmistry might serve to amuse our disturbed guests. I have always fancied that, believing in his own skill, he had hoped thus to learn much of the characters of the inmates of Braithe. But it was Herbert's close resemblance to the portrait of our great-great-great-grandfather that caused Mr. Fadd's suspicions to centre ultimately upon him. Mr. Praie had overheard Herbert's conversation with me at the foot of the staircase, and had thus learned that he contemplated leaving Braithe. But it was Mr. Fadd who had insisted that he would go secretly, and that very evening. The detectives, however, had yielded to Mr. Fadd's wish that Etienne should not be told either that Herbert was the thief, or that he might even then be seeking to escape, until after midnight.

Students are, sometimes, cruel. Had Mr. Fadd been content to forego his strange study of superstitions—and of the doctrine of heredity—I might have been spared two hours of anguish.

Herbert's past record was never known. He had told Lilian the police were seeking him, and that the house was watched, in order to work upon her fears sufficiently to enable him to carry out his plans. The anxiety, and the subsequent fright, made Lilian ill. She could not rid herself of the fancy that Lydia pursued her. The mirrors in her room had to be covered;

she dared not look in them, dreading lest she might see Lydia's grave-gray face, and meet her awful eyes.

Ten days passed before she was able to go, with little Jane and me, to the cottage that Etienne had taken for us on the south shore of Long Island. But by the last of August she was well enough to make the promised visit to Mrs. Ainslie, and returned to Braithe only in time to prepare for her marriage to Ralph Carrington. Etienne had insisted that Mr. Carrington must know of her secret marriage to Herbert. So she herself told him, and so cleverly, that he thought her but the innocent victim of Herbert's selfishness, and his affection for her was, through pity, increased tenfold.

Etienne and I were not very happy. He could not realize that I had forgiven his jealous outburst, long before a month was over—and I was too shy to tell him so. It was impossible for me to bring myself to speak of that night of misery. He was very, very kind to Janey and me, quick to note any change that might add to our comfort, and ever striving to promote our pleasure. But he seemed to care little what he did himself; and when his face was in repose, it was always sad. This worried me; and I fretted over his altered looks, and our changed relations, until I lost my color, and grew thin—thus increasing his unhappiness, and making my little sister miserable.

Lilian was married in October. To please her, I consented to put off my mourning, and to wear colors on her wedding day. Her superstitious fears thus far quieted, her anxiety that the day might be fair became painful—since happy is the bride that the sun shines on. Fortunately, it proved to be perfect. The sun shone clear and warm. The trees were in gala attire of shaded crimsons, reds, yellows, and softest browns. The river—a pale blue mirror—reflected

shores and mountains veiled in purple haze, and the broad sweep of a turquoise sky.

The chapel was decked with chrysanthemums; with long sprays of the graceful woodbine, dyed the deepest red; with branches of russet-stained oak, and great boughs of the many-tinted maple. So much had the little church become a part of the woodland that it seemed as though the old garden—gay with autumnal flowers—and the belt of richly colored trees, through which came the wedding guests, were but its lengthened aisle.

The wedding was in the afternoon and Lilian made the loveliest of brides; so fair and pure looking in her snowy satin, and veil of filmy lace. The chapel was filled to overflowing with a gay crowd from town, and a few of these friends were to remain with us for a short visit. Because of the long afternoon of festivity the evening was cut rather short, and it was but eleven o'clock when our guests said good-night.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Love, who had lingered behind the others for a few last words with me, at the foot of the staircase, "do you know, Mrs. Theo, that this beast," laying her hand upon the leopard newel-post, "always reminds me of the late lamented. Now don't look grieved over my flippancy; his being dead doesn't sanctify him any to me—not a bit! And when I cast my eye on any of these catty, heraldic animals of yours, I seem to see Herbert Fayne again. He had such a pantherish way of sliding around after you, and watching you, Madam R. I used to wish that somebody would just choke the deviltry out of him. Why, lovely girl, don't turn so pale! I didn't mean to talk such a lot of rot about Fayne, but the truth is he got on my nerves the last time I was here. I used to catch myself holding my breath, waiting for him to pounce! That gown of yours is just about perfect, do you know it? I'm glad you put on a low bodice for dinner.

The other was pretty, too; but your shoulders are too handsome to hide. And I'm glad you got your gewgaws back. Somehow the more you sling on the better. Why, beside you the bride wasn't even a well-backed second choice! Oh, here comes Rappelle with a lot of men. Kiss me good-night, quick!"

She ran upstairs, and I followed. I went into my dressing-room. Josette was not there. Returning softly to the gallery, I looked over the railing. Etienne was re-entering the library, alone. He swung the baize door to behind him, but, disregarding this no-admittance signal, I went slowly downstairs. I felt overwhelmed by all he had done for me and mine; he had been so very generous to Lilian, so tender with little Jane, so good to me. I thought I would try to thank him. I would tell him how deeply I appreciated his protecting care. I wondered if I should have the courage to say what I felt. I lingered, hesitating; then, pulling open the baize door gently, I tapped lightly on the heavier one behind. No answer. I turned the knob, and looked in.

He stood beside the hearth, his back toward me; one arm rested against the tall chimney-piece, his head was bowed upon it, and his attitude expressed utter weariness and the most profound dejection. This hurt me so much that I forgot my shyness of the moment before. I took up my trailing draperies firmly, and holding them so that they should not rustle and betray me, crossed the room with noiseless step and laid my hand upon his shoulder. He lifted his face—so grave and careworn—and, seeing who it was, held out a kind hand, while he smiled a welcome.

"What can I do for you, Theo?" he asked, gently, seeming to think I had come to beg some new favor.

"Two things, kind sir," I said, gayly. He must not know that I had noticed his depression of spirits.

"Name them, please."

"First, monseigneur," I said, with mock solemnity, while I spread out my skirts with both hands and swept him a low courtesy, "I wish you to say that you are satisfied with your own taste"—he had chosen my gown—"and to tell me that I have not done it discredit."

I folded my hands demurely, and awaited his judgment.

He looked me over slowly, with a would-be critical expression in his keen dark eyes. And, although I knew that my dressmaker had outdone herself, I found that I had overrated my own powers. I could not stand his scrutiny coolly, and my heart began to beat.

My gown was exquisite, of palest pink silk, so rich that in certain lights it looked as though beaded with pearls. The rare point-lace that almost covered it was like a tracery of intricate frost-work. High on the left shoulder, close to the big puffs that served as sleeves, and held in place by a diamond butterfly, lay three red roses—a bud, a half-blown rose, and the perfect flower. In my hair sparkled the diamond crescent with its companion stars; the Gypsy's Opal glowed at my throat, held by its gleaming chain. And I wore a breast-knot of opals and diamonds—Etienne's latest gift.

"You think," he said, at last, with a smile half amused, half sad, "that I have waited till now to look at you, Theo?"

"No," I said, blushing at my own ill-behavior, yet not mending my ways, "but you have not told me that I pleased you. Do I please you, Etienne?"

The color surged into his face, his eyes flashed; he stepped forward, then stopped short, paling to the lips, as though it cost him a great effort to control himself.

"An idle question from you to me, Theo," he said, gravely, and there was reproach in his voice. "You

know well that you always please me far too much for my happiness."

"Etienne," I cried, holding out my hands to him, the ready tears springing to my eyes, "Etienne, forgive me! I am ashamed."

He took the outstretched hands gently, kissed them, and let them fall.

"Tell me the second thing that I am to do for you, Theo," he said, quietly.

"Just that for this once you will let me thank you, Etienne," I said, impulsively; "just that you will let me tell you how deeply I appreciate——"

I got no further, for he raised his hand to enjoin silence.

"If you really wished to please me, Theo," he said, sadly, "you would spare me all nonsense of this kind." He glanced at the clock, then said hurriedly, "It is not laté, if you could give me a few moments, there is something I must speak to you about—but no, you have had a day of fatigue, you must be tired; another time will do."

But I was anxious to make amends, and remembering that he liked to see me in Old Vivian's chair, begged him to draw it forward that I might sit beside the fire.

"Now begin, please," I said, smiling up at him as I seated myself. "I am not at all tired, and there is plenty of time."

He returned to his former position, leaning against the chimney-piece on the opposite side of the wide hearth. Instead of speaking, he stared down at the smoldering logs, that were already beginning to crumble into ashes, with sombre eyes—eyes that did not see the fire, but something that memory, or imagination, pictured.

Always susceptible to surroundings, the gloom of the big room, with its dusky corners, the old portrait

of the wicked Vivian (looking vindictively down upon the sad-faced Rappelle who had become the owner not only of Braithe House and Manor, but also of his brilliantly clad descendant now seated in his very chair), and Etienne's attitude of determined composure, yet air of intense melancholy, weighed upon my spirits and crushed them down. I felt suddenly oppressed, frightened by the depressing atmosphere. I began to wonder what I was to hear, if Etienne were displeased with me. I had been very gay and merry all that day; I had laughed and jested with everyone, thoroughly enjoying the excitement and bustle attending the wedding. Lilian and Ralph were so very happy, and little Jane had been in an ecstasy over everything.

"I'm so wickedly glad to be rid of Lilian that I can't be as sorry for poor Ralph as I ought," she had said. "For, of course, he'll rue the day. Lilian's been a wet-blanket and a scourge. Come, let's put the Cats in pages' capes and caps of red leaves, and make them look as gay as we feel!"

Had we been too gay, Janey and I? Was Etienne annoyed? Would he take me to task over my light-hearted behavior? As I worried myself with these questions, sitting quite still in the great high-backed chair, Etienne transferred his gaze from the crumbling logs to me, and I saw that he strove to smooth his set face into more cheerful curves.

"I have made up my mind to send you and Janey away for the winter, Theo," he said, at last. "To the Riviera, perhaps. I think that you need rest and a complete change of scene."

"You forget that I have had both, Etienne," I said, smiling; "Janey and I have just come home. But if you would like to go, that is a different matter, and little Jane and I will be quite willing to repack our trunks."

He grew a trifle paler. "I shall stay here," he said. "Merle can take you over, and remain with you. He knows what you like; and I can trust him." I looked at him in such evident surprise that he added, "When I say you need rest, Theo, I mean absence from me—rest from the life of pretence you so dislike."

I did not speak. I sat very still, marvelling at his lack of insight. For I loved him—and this he failed to understand.

"You must not fancy, Theo, that you have shown, by word or look, that you find your surroundings wearing. You have too sweet a disposition, and too much tact, ever to betray your discomfort to others. But you can't prevent my seeing that you grow thin, or hide the great circles under your eyes."

Again there was silence in the large room; save for the gentle rustle of settling ashes on the hearth, not a sound.

"I will come to see you during the winter, Theo—there shall be no vulgar gossip over our affairs—and in the spring we will make a fresh start. By then, please God, my shortcomings may have faded from your memory."

He looked full at me when he stopped speaking, and I knew that he expected an answer of some kind. But what he had said had wrought wonderful changes in the atmosphere. The room no longer appeared gloomy; Old Vivian's hitherto vindictive face had become expressionless; and my blood began to dance wildly through my veins, driven by a thrill of excitement. For I knew the time had come for me to put an end to his doubts forever. I was a little frightened, yet I did not wish to keep him waiting. I wanted to tell him soberly, gravely, of my affection; to be dignified and very calm. But, in spite of my efforts, I could not bring myself to behave as I thought

right, since it is not in moments of great excitement that one can alter one's nature.

Hardly knowing what I did, I unfastened the diamond butterfly on my shoulder, freed the three roses and placing them singly in a row on my silken lap, glanced up at Etienne—and smiled.

"Did you ever study botany, Etienne?"

"No, Theo," he said, watching me intently.

"Those three roses that I gave you on our wedding-day, Etienne, you did not pull them to pieces to see how they were made?"

"More idle questions, Theo?" he said—I saw that his turn to wonder had come. "This last makes three to-night."

"A question—for each rose," I said, dreamily. "But those other roses—you threw them away?"

No answer.

"Did you, Etienne?"

"No," he said, briefly. And I saw that he was displeased, thinking me unkind.

"They must be sadly withered by now," I said, musingly. Then, looking down at the roses, "I have no horn-book, Etienne, but if you will come here I can give you, with these"—I touched the roses lightly—"your first lesson in—flowers."

He came quickly, an eager light in his dark eyes; and that he might the better read my face, pushed my footstool a little aside, and dropped lightly on one knee.

"You kneel gracefully, Etienne," I said, approvingly. "Few men do."

"Thank you," he answered, quietly, an amused smile curving his lips. "You ought to be a finished judge, Theo, so the compliment is great."

"You shall be decorated," I went on, only showing by the hot blush I could not control that I had heard what he said, "and with the order of the butterfly."

And I pinned the one that had held the roses upon his coat.

He bent his head and kissed my arm just below the elbow, as my hands were busied fastening the sparkling brooch. And the touch of his lips set my fingers trembling so that it was with difficulty I accomplished my task. I leaned back in my chair and looked down again at the roses on my lap; I dared not meet his eyes.

"Listen to the story of the roses," I said softly, and as though speaking to a child. "And you must be good, and not interrupt—else it may never be finished, Etienne."

"Ah, Theo," he murmured, "if——"

I held up my hand. "Listen!" I said. "These are strange roses; they have taken a long, long time, to unclose. See," I lifted the bud, "in mid-April this little bud uncurled its first green leaf, and beneath was the rosy flush of the coming flower. But it did not quite emerge from its sheath till—till the last of May, Etienne."

He laid his hand, palm upward, upon my knee. "Give me the bud, Theo," he said.

I laid it in his open palm, but he took both hand and blossom and held them close. So I lifted the half-blown rose with my left hand, held it to my lips a moment, then said, in the merest whisper, though I strove to tune my voice to a higher key:

"This shows what June would have done for the little bud—if you had not gathered it, Etienne."

"My darling!" he murmured, as he caught the rose, and, placing it with what he had before taken, rained kisses upon hand and flowers.

My heart beat so violently it stirred the laces on my bosom. His passion made my affection seem but a slight, pale thing. The great red rose that still lay

upon my knee was a more fitting symbol of his love, than of mine.

"Theo," he whispered, pleadingly, "Theo—the perfect flower? Can I hope for that, too?"

His strong face was white with emotion, his brilliant eyes glowed with passionate entreaty. I swayed toward him; I laid the flower against his lips.

"In July," I faltered, "all its petals opened for you—Etienne."

As he held me close, covering my face and throat with kisses, I heard the clocks throughout the house chime the hour.

"This is your wedding favor, Etienne," I whispered, slipping the rose into his button-hole. "Now take me to the chapel—come!"

He rose, lifting me from the great arm-chair. But still he did not release me, and his lips sought mine.

"Ah, Etienne!" I cried, entreatingly, "we must make haste. And you and I will repeat our vows. Just you and I, alone together."

He needed no explanation of my feelings, but saying he would get me a wrap—since the night was chill—went to my room by way of his private staircase, and fetched me one.

"Josette?" I asked, anxiously.

"She was not there."

"No one must know, Etienne."

He smiled his answer, as he wrapped the cloak about me.

The hall was empty as we passed out and closed the great door softly behind us.

It was a white night. No clouds disputed the sovereignty of the moon, enthroned aloft in a heaven of crystal. And Jack Frost was abroad. He had powdered the heads of the tall chrysanthemums with silver, as they kept night-watch in the old-fashioned flower garden; guarding the sun-dial that slept, rest-

ing from its day of labor—true to the motto carved upon its breast:

"I count life by sunny hours and them alone."

The trees of the woodland spread their great branches above us in silent benediction, as we passed along the path. The waves of the broad river rang musically against the pebbly shore, chiming like fairy wedding bells. The chapel was dimly alight, the moon's brilliancy illuminating its dusky spaces. The painted saints of the windows—a row of serene-faced ghosts, showing pale outlines against the glory of the white world outside—looked shyly down upon us.

Hand in hand we walked silently up the aisle, and kneeling at the steps of the chancel repeated, in hushed voices, the vows that bound us together for so long as we both should live.

The stern old house looked bright and cheerful as we left woodland and garden and mounted its steep flight of steps. Many windows were alight, showing that the wedding guests were still awake.

I glanced across the lawn to where the Leopards sat on their posts of stone. But they looked as though extinguishers had been drawn tightly down over their menacing figures, so muffled were they in the bravery of little Jane's providing.

When we entered Hervey was busy covering the back-log with ashes; and his arrangement of the few lamps left burning made the old verse above the chimney-piece stand out in bold relief:

Plight trouthe, Faith and Honour,
Ysaved wele Braithe Manor.

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